

The days of negative politics are over: Oli

SHAHJADPUR, May 13: Communications Minister Oli Ahmad said the days of negative politics are over and with the passage of time it has undergone a lot of qualitative change. People do not buy the politics of indiscriminate criticism of the ruling party, he said, reports BSS.

He was addressing a big public meeting here Sunday after laying the foundation of "Mokhdum Shah-Habibullah" bridge to be constructed over river Karotoa at a cost of nine crore eight lakh taka having a length of 977 feet.

Oli Ahmad said, during the last three years the present government has successfully brought about a revolutionary change in the field of communication. A good number of major bridges of the country including Shambhuganj bridge over Brahmaputra in Mymensingh, Mohananda bridge in Chapainawabganj and Daudkandi bridge in Comilla were constructed and made open during the period, he added.

The minister said about 15,000 km of road has been constructed and each and every thana has got road link as part of tremendous infrastructural development.

He said when the whole of the country was pulsating with developmental activities and the country has become able to contribute 33 per cent to the

development budget from own resources and people have become optimistic about the country's future, there should not be any justifiable reason to hinder in the process.

Unfortunately, the minister said, this is the time when a group of self-seeking politicians who have become desperate to take power in their grip by any means are trying to impede the process of development.

It is also not understandable why they should refrain from joining the parliament. He called upon the Members of the Parliament irrespective of party affiliation to join the parliament and assimilate their valued thoughts and ideas to find out solutions to all problems of the country.

Referring to demand of neutral government, the minister said, no neutral government could ensure free and fair election until laws are firmly built and the politicians have the willingness to strictly adhere to them.

Oli said those criticising the BNP government has made the country economically handicapped, were far from the truth. He said they should not forget that during their regime not a single Taka was contributed from the country's own resources to run development activities.

Passengers face immense problems on Khulna-Rajbari rly section

From Our Correspondent

KUSHTIA, May 13: Train passengers on the Khulna-Rajbari Railway section have been facing immense difficulties due to irregular train service.

The number of trains on this section is inadequate. The number of compartments in each train is also not sufficient to meet the requirement.

Besides, the passenger coaches both in inter-city and local trains are in deplorable condition. Very often first class and second class compartments are not attached to the trains creating great inconvenience to the passengers. They are compelled to travel in the over-crowded third class compartments. The sick, old, women and children who cannot board the trains on different stations are the worst sufferers. Sometimes passengers travel in luggage vans and on the roof of trains.

Number of passengers travelling without tickets has increased. It has aggravated the situation as there is no checking in this line causing untold misery to the genuine passengers.

On the other hand, beggars, hawkers, toll collectors and smugglers multiply the suffering of the passengers.

The compartments of the trains are not kept clean and in the absence of water supply in the trains the latrines remain dirty emitting bad smell causing health hazard to the passengers.

Waiting rooms in most of the stations have no sitting arrangements for the first and second class passengers. The condition of the waiting rooms in all the stations is very pitiable and most of the time they remain under lock and key.

The booking counter starts functioning just before the arrival of the train. As a result, many passengers fail to purchase tickets causing loss to the railway authorities.

It is alleged that booking counter in all stations charge increased rate of fare from the passengers. Sometimes they sell tickets beyond the capacity of the train thus overcrowding the compartments and causing misery to the passengers.

The ticket examiners, security guards, drivers and guards on duty remain silent when unruly ticketless passengers stop the train at different stations to rob the passengers of their valuables.

Smuggled goods like sarees, salt, sugar, fruits, cosmetics and crockeries are transported regularly by trains.

Pickpockets lift the luggage of the passengers during the quarrel on the issue of toll collection unnecessarily creating nuisance.

The office-goers by trains urged the railway authorities to remove the obstacles for the smooth train journey on this line.

Contraband medicine on sale

Substandard life saving drugs and contraband medicines have flooded the markets in the urban and rural areas of the district. This has been attributed to the mushroom growth of unlicensed medicine shops in various parts of the district. Many of

those unlicensed pharmacies have been carrying out their illegal business and they sell sub-standard and banned medicines which endanger the lives of the patients.

The mushroom growth of pharmaceutical factories was also responsible for manufacturing the sub-standard drugs, it is further alleged. These companies obtain certificates from the concerned authorities and market their products with attractive publicity.

A section of physicians are patronising these sub-standard medicines. It is complained that the representatives of drug companies allure these physicians to prescribe their products by presenting attractive gifts.

The village quacks prescribe these medicines as they are available at a cheaper price. The poor villagers use these medicines without the desired result. Many medicine shops are running business both in urban and rural bazars without drug licence, it is alleged.

The people believe monogram of the testing authority should be inscribed on the bottles of medicines. And exemplary punishment should be meted out to the manufacturers of sub-standard medicines while inspection by drug houses should be intensified.

Indian jute seeds flood market

With the beginning of raw jute consumption in paper mills for making pulp, the farmers have responded with a new hope for earning more profit from jute and they have decided to bring more areas

under cultivation of jute. But scarcity of good quality jute seed has dampened their hope and they are frantically moving here and there to collect jute seed.

Taking the opportunity of jute seed crisis smugglers have become active in procuring jute seed from India and those Indian seeds have flooded the border markets of Meherpur, Chuadanga, Jhenidah, Jessore, Kushtia, Khulna and Satkhira districts.

"Mahamaya" and "Devdash" — two varieties of Indian jute seeds — have occupied those markets and are being sold in the haats and bazars and villages of the border district.

When contacted the jute growers of the villages told this correspondent that they obtained good harvest from the HYV Indian jute seed last year. The yield rose to five maunds per bigha while the local jute seed could produce only three maunds per bigha.

Jute seed sells at an exorbitant price in the haats and bazars of the districts. The local jute seed sells at Tk 25 to Tk 30 while smuggled jute seed sells at Tk 50 per kg.

Meanwhile, government efforts to manufacture paper from the green jute has been welcomed by all concerned. All the paper mills of the country are now taking steps for producing paper from green jute and the shortage of raw materials in paper sector is expected to be overcome if jute cultivation gains momentum.

HYV jute cultivation will also bring about a change in the lot of poor cultivators who have so long been deprived of any profit from jute production.

Rectified spirit is being freely consumed as alcohol by the youths in the district town causing moral degradation.

Residents complained that addicted young people buy the spirit from homeopathic doctors and take it as alcohol by mixing water.

It is alleged that some dishonest homeopathic doctors in spite of having licences to practise and manufacture are selling the spirit to the addicts at exorbitant prices.

As per government rule, licences for rectified spirit are only issued to the bona fide homeopathic practitioners and homeo-medicine manufacturers.

It may be mentioned that there is no liquor shop in the district but it is openly sold in the town.

Meanwhile, drug addiction among the youth has increased here causing concern among the parents and guardians.

District roundup

PABNA

Chicken pox breaks out

May 13: Chicken pox that broke out in the district in an alarming form so far affected 200 people in seven thanas, health officials said, reports UNB.

The disease engulfed 20 villages of Sadar, Atgharia, Chatmohar, Faridpur, Bhangura, Iswardi and Sathia thanas creating panic among the people.

It may be mentioned here that it is for the second time the disease has broken out in the rural areas this year.

Meanwhile, the local Health Department said that necessary preventive measures have been taken by the administration to contain the disease.

BARISAL

Food for edn programme

May 13: Government has sanctioned 89,37,000 kilograms of wheat under Food for Education Programme for 51,733 students of 40,440 families under Barisal division during the current academic year. If covered Barisal, Jhalakati, Bhola, Pirojpur, Patuakhali and Barguna districts, reports BSS.

According to primary education office sources, the wheat is being distributed at the rate of 15 kilograms per month per student.

Of the total, 15,460 students of 12,856 families are being benefited in Barisal district, 9,110 students of 6,576 families in Patuakhali, 11,555 students of 8,367 families in Bhola, 6,580 students of 4,297 families in Pirojpur, 4,888 students of 3,779 families in Barguna and 4,140 students of 3,565 families in Jhalakati districts.

BARISAL

Fire-engine unit handed over

May 13: A fire-engine unit 'Agnihatak' was handed over to the Barisal River Fire Service station on Friday by Brig (Rtd) Nurul Islam Laskar, Director General of Fire Services, reports BSS.

According to an official source, government sanctioned Tk 1.47 crore for the construction of the unit.

The unit Agnihatak was constructed at Narayanganj Dockyard last year. The unit has been provided with modern and automatic fire fighting equipment the source added.

KHULNA

Red Cross day observed

May 13: Red Cross and Red Crescent Day was observed here in Khulna as elsewhere in the country in a befitting manner, reports BSS.

The day's programmes included seminars, discussion meeting by various organisations.

A discussion meeting highlighting the significance of the day was held at the conference room of Khulna City Corporation under auspices of Khulna unit of Bangladesh Red Crescent Society.

Presided over by the vice president of the Khulna unit Advocate Moinuddin Ahmed the meeting was addressed among others by Advocate Enayet Ali Principal Mazharul Hannan Sarwar Khan, Advocate Gazi Abdul Bari, Shaikh Amjad Hossain and Engineer Liaquat Ali.

Speakers called upon the people to serve the suffering humanity selflessly.

Misappropriation of relief goods alleged

Erosion-hit people yet to be rehabilitated

JAMALPUR, May 13: Thousands of victims who have been rendered shelterless on account of erosion of the rivers Jamuna and old Brahmaputra in six thanas of the district in the last three years are yet to be rehabilitated, reports UNB.

According to an estimate, over 10,000 families of Dewanganj, Bakshiganj, Islampur, Madarganj, Sharihabari and Sadar thana have been rendered destitute during the period. Some 20,000 acres of farmlands have also been devoured by the rivers.

According to official sources, so far cash and relief materials worth Tk 3 crore have been distributed through the thana administration for their rehabilitation. But the affected people alleged that not a single family has so far been rehabilitated as most of the relief materials and cash have been misappropriated.

As a result, a large number of people migrated to different towns including the capital

and became slum dwellers to eke out their living.

About 5,000 families have taken shelter on 70 kilometres embankment stretching from Jagannathganj Ghat to Sanandabari of Dewanganj.

Relief Ministry sanctioned a huge quantity of relief goods for sustenance and rehabilitation of the helpless families on recommendations from the UP chairmen and local Parliament members.

But concerned UP members and officials admitted that most of the sanctioned money and materials, did not reach the appropriate people and were misappropriated at the district or thana level.

This could be revealed by verifying the master-roll recipients of the relief materials preserved at the thana headquarters, they said.

Local conscious people said the plundering of relief materials could be minimised if a strong monitoring system was introduced after sanctioning the same.



SYLHET: Humayun Rashid Chowdhury, former foreign minister distributing prizes among the winners of Sylhet Press Club Indoor games competition held recently. — Star photo

Portion of embankment on illegal occupation

From Our Correspondent

NATORE, May 13: A section of traders are occupying different parts of the one and a half crore taka embankment to erect small shops.

The dam was constructed by Natore Water Development Board authority along the river Atrai at a cost of Taka 1.5 crore to save the Natore town and vast tract of paddy field in the area.

Local sources said some influential people of the area were occupying the land on the embankment for rent or to sell at higher prices. Part of the newly constructed embankment has already been damaged in between Atrai health complex and ISD godown, they said.

The WDB officials were unavailable for comment but local sources said they have failed to check the unauthorised construction after several attempts to stop the illegal work.

Tk 19 lakh allocated for edn scheme

From Our Correspondent

HABIGANJ, May 13: Ministry of Education has allocated Tk 18,51,772 for the implementation of a development scheme of four educational institutions at Habiganj district this year, according to official sources.

Facilities department, Sylhet will implement this development scheme.

The scheme includes construction of two-storied building of Baniyachong Govt High School, at a cost of Tk 5,97,819, extension work of science building of Rajar Bazar Govt High School, Chunerughat at a cost of Tk 6,99,992, repairing and re-construction of Habiganj B K G C Govt Girls High School at a cost of Tk 6,64,028.

Sunflower holds big promise for the country

by Naimul Haq

Soyabean oil has over the years become the most popular cooking medium in Bangladesh. But cultivation of soyabean has remained the least important in agriculture. At least Tk 500 crore in foreign exchange is spent annually to import various cooking oils of which soyabean is on the top of the list. A substantial amount of foreign exchange can be saved if we find an alternative to soyabean oil which can be produced locally. A non-government organisation called Employment and Technology Development Agency (ETDA) came up with an idea of growing sunflower for its oil which is popular in many parts of the world as a cooking medium.

Planning was easy but implementing the programme was tough. To start with, ETDA

The ETDA extended the necessary credit to the farmers to purchase fertilisers and other inputs. Power tillers were provided to plough the land. Seeds were supplied too on credit. The two villages chosen were Vairteck and Thanar Hat. About 52 acres in Vairteck and 48 acres in Thanar Hat were taken up for sunflower cultivation.

One of the remarkable characteristics of sunflower plant is its capability to grow in saline environment with a deep taproot. The villages were selected for their location in the coastal belt, the saline soil of which is a perfect partner of sunflower plant.

In four months the plants matured and were ready for extracting seeds. The plants were grown during the dry season when no other crop grows in the area. Surprisingly, the

put would be much less. On an average about Tk 2000 was invested to cultivate sunflower seeds on an acre of land. The market value of the produce was Tk 5000 to 6000. Sunflower seed production per acre of land could be higher provided the soil contains enough phosphorus and nitrogen. These minerals are vital, especially during the seeds growth.

The Bangladesh Tobacco Company (BTC) has already proved that a higher yield per acre of land is possible. BTC implemented a project to grow sunflower plants on 950 acres of land in the northern region of the country. Each acre produced more than 740 kilograms of seeds which was considered quite economical.

"Getting more seeds per acre is not that im-

portant here. What is important is motivating the people to use sunflower oil," says B I Siddique, President of ETDA.

Sunflower oil, according to laboratory tests, contains far lower cholesterol or fatty acids which play a leading role in the formation of fat in blood vessels in the body. Sunflower oil is very popular among the European, American, and Australian consumers. "We must take the opportunity to use this potential crop," says Siddique. He explains, "Sunflower oil is yet to be popular in our country. Farmers give negative response when a foreign crop is introduced. This kind of attitude needs to be reversed."



Sunflower plants in Vairteck village

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At present only an insignificant proportion of land is used for sunflower cultivation. Large-scale projects along with motivation

programmes are needed to promote the use of sunflower oil. "For this private initiative is very important," says Siddique, adding, "establishment of small industries to extract oil from the seeds ought to be encouraged by the government so that sunflower oil is easily available all over the country."

The type of machine (ghanis) used to extract oil in the country gives smaller quantity of oil per kilogram. A kilogram of sunflower seeds when put into a grinding machine produces 400 to 450 grams of oil.

"Expellers or baby mills which can give up to 600 grams of oil per kilogram of raw sunflower seeds should be introduced in larger number," Siddique added.

Some sunflower oil producers expressed the view that its output cost could be lower

once value added tax (VAT) and customs duty on the baby mills were reduced. "One has to pay 15 per cent VAT and 45 per cent customs duty to import a baby mill," says an oil producer. "Some of these obstacles could easily be removed," feels another producer.

Whatever the drawbacks, sunflower cultivation, nationwide, is gaining popularity, though, at a tortoise speed. More farmers are enquiring about the process of sunflower cultivation. In the meantime, ETDA aims to grow sunflower plants in the coastal belts of Cox's Bazar, Bhola, Jhalokathi, Feni, Laximpur, Barguna, Patuakhali and Barisal districts during the next dry season.

The ETDA's initiative in this field is undoubtedly encouraging and praiseworthy. No doubt, it deserves support from all quarters.

Betel leaf farmers face problems

From Our Correspondent

SATKHIRA, May 13: The betel leaf farming in different thanas of Satkhira district has been facing set back. Want of necessary loan and scarcity of other raw materials like jute stick, bamboo, oil cake, pesticides and other necessary materials are the problems faced by the growers.

It is gathered that betel leaf farming was the main occupation of some families of Tala, Assasuni, Sadar, Debhata, Kaligonj and Kalaroa thanas of the district. But for last four years betel leaf farming suffered serious setback.

It is further learnt that the reasons behind this scarcity and high prices of necessary materials are excessive rainfall and drought for the last few years.

When contacted some betel leaf growers of the area said that they are thinking of giving up betel leaf farming because of poor returns.

It may be mentioned here that the farmers have to invest Taka sixty thousand cultivating per acre of land which is more than its sale price.

On the other hand due to scarcity of jute stick and Dhaincha, the farmers have to use bamboo sticks with an exorbitant price for constructing frame of the betel leaf garden. A piece of bamboo is now being sold at Tk 50-60 which is not also available in the market.

Besides, the prices of oil cake, fertilizer and insecticide have also gone out of purchasing capacity of the poor farmers.

Moreover hazardous communications of the district are also hampering transport of betel leaf to Dhaka and other districts of the country where it has a great demand.

The farmers cultivate this crop by adopting age-old, unscientific means. Agricultural experts opine, if the scientific process of its cultivation is applied, the production will be doubled.