

## 6,350 cft of valuable timber recovered

From CHT Correspondent

RANGAMATI, May 21: Forest officials here have recovered about 6,350 cubic feet (left) of illicit timbers of different valuable species worth over Taka 34 lakh within seven months in a number of raids. These were illegally extracted from the government reserved forests.

The Range Officer of Rangamati Forest Range, Krishna Pada Saha recovered 3,500 cft of valuable timbers worth over Taka 17.5 lakh from the different saw mills and timber depots at Rangamati town within a period of seven months through a number of surprise raids. The valuable timbers like teak, gamar, shikora etc. according to the official sources, were illegally extracted from the government reserved forests and stored at the different saw mills and timber depots for smuggling out from Rangamati applying various non-conventional methods and consuming locally, mainly as furniture.

Rangamati Forest Range, an unit out of 13 units of Chittagong Hill Tracts South Forest Division (CHTSDN), having no territorial jurisdiction, have been working towards abatement of the piffage of forest produces and ensuring systematic conservation of forests, sources added.

The Station Officer, Ghagra Forest Check and Tolls Station, Riazul Matin has seized 2850 cft of miscellaneous timber including 1000 cft of firewood worth over Taka 10.25 lakh and furniture worth over Taka two lakh while being smuggled out from Rangamati to the other parts of the country within last one year, officials said. The major portion of the seized timber in round and convertible forms from different valuable species were recovered from the passenger-carrying buses. The Ghagra Check and Tolls Station has earned revenue amounting to Taka 4 lakh from bamboo, extracted from the unclassified state forest land within a year which is a record earning of this station, sources added.

## Abducted tribals return safe

From CHT Correspondent

RANGAMATI, May 21: Two tribals - who were abducted on the night of May 11, allegedly by a group of armed tribals - were found at Nallyachhari hill with their eyes fastened, villagers and Kauhali thana police said.

According to the sources, Mong Thoi Prue Karbai, 40, and Banahi Mohan Marma, 39, of Kulapara village of Kauhali thana were found missing from the midnight of May 11 till the dawn of May 14. They left their home on the call of some armed tribals. A tense situation was prevailing among the villagers till they found them in the hills.

## Electricity bills worth TK 6 crore outstanding in Tangail pourashava

TANGAIL, May 21: At least Tk 6 crore have fallen outstanding as electric bills in Tangail poura area and Elenga region. Official sources said that of the amount Tk 5 crore 82 lakh 67 thousand and 140 is lying outstanding upto March 95, reports BSS.

The breakup of the outstanding, Tk 2 crore to pourashava, Tk 96 lakh to agriculture sector, Tk 40.71 lakh to works department, Tk 6 lakh to polytechnic institute, about Tk 10 lakh to different shops, and Tk 17 lakh to the domestic sector, the sources added.

In March last Tk one crore and thirty lakh was realised. Meanwhile a good number of electric lines were disconnected for nonpayment of bills, the source added.

## Acute scarcity of petrol, diesel in Kushtia

KUSHTIA, May 21: Acute scarcity of petrol and diesel is prevailing in the southern region since last couple of days due to strike called by oil-tanker drivers.

Taking the opportunity, black marketers are selling the items in the district at Tk 40 per litre instead of Tk 14.

District administration told UNB that due to the strike, the commodity could not be brought from Khulna depot.

The strike was called by the tank lorry drivers following a clash between transport workers of Khulna and Kushtia on Tuesday.

The dispute could not be solved till writing this report, sources said.



These are a few of the 200 boats that used to ferry people across the river Meghna. Now with the construction of Meghna-Gomoti Bridge many of these boatmen face possible loss of livings. — Star photo by A K M Mohsin

## Less than 10mm rainfall recorded

# Thousands of acres of land still remain fallow

From Our Correspondent

JAMALPUR, May 21: The agricultural production of aus, jute, sugarcane, sweet potato and other seasonal crops have received set back in Jamalpur district for shortage of rainfall during the current season.

As a result, the fate of more than 50,000 families depending on agriculture of the district has become uncertain.

A plan to bring 50,000 acres of land under aus and jute cultivation in the seven thanas of the district was fixed during this season, but shortage of rainfall at the peak sowing period left 10,000 acres of land totally barren. IRRI-boro plants on 25,000 acres of land, in the meantime, have dried up.

About 4.5 lakh acres of IRRI-boro land were brought under irrigation programme and about 50,000 acres of jute and aus land in the district are completely dependent on nature.

The highlands were badly affected by drought and 25,000 acres of boro plants have gradually withered away for want of water.

The agriculturist experts apprehend that during the current season jute and aus cultivation target will not be achieved which would push the district into a shortfall of food and jute production.

Meanwhile, famine like condition is prevailing in the district and there is no job opportunity for the labourers since there is no work in the fields.

On the other hand, during the current season, the IRRI-boro production will fall by 30 per cent from total target in Jamalpur district due to fertilizer crisis.

According to the district Agriculture Extension Department (AED), 30,250 acres of land under jute and 27,500 acres of land under aus and 18,302 acres of land for growing other seasonal crops remained fallow in the district for shortage of rainfall.

During the whole monsoon the district experienced only 10mm of rainfall, but for cultivation of jute and aus and other crops about 200mm of rainfall is needed. As a result normal plantation has been severely affected.

To cope with the drought situation the Water Development Board and the cultivators took measures to irrigate the IRRI-boro land with deep tubewells.

The farmers said that the measures were too late to meet their demand. If the measures to irrigate land were taken at the beginning of monsoon it could be possible to cultivate more land.

Farmers, those who do not depend on government and non-government agencies, irrigate their land using shallow tubewells, power pumps, treadle pumps and using other methods.

Meanwhile, for want of water IRRI plants on vast tract of land have dried up and cracks have developed in the soil. Weeds have grown and the transplanted seedlings were also found to be drying up.

While visiting some villages of the district, this correspondent found that about 30 per cent boro and 40 per cent *tabi* crops were damaged and tiny jute plants have already dried up turning brownish.

The underground water level has further gone down. Consequently, deep tubewells and power pumps are not functioning satisfactorily. Ordinary tubewells are also not functioning. This correspondent found the village women fetching drinking water from ditches and similar water bodies. Wells and tubewells, ponds, canals, beels, haors of the district have dried up causing cracks in the fields and also hampering pisciculture.

Meanwhile, unilateral withdrawal of water has made the situation worse than ever imagined, said, Shofuddin Ahmed, Project Director of GK Project while giving data from 1988 that showed downward

trend in flows in Ganges. The last Bangladesh-India memorandum of understanding on Ganges water sharing expired May 31, 1988. Since then part of Bangladesh have had difficult dry seasons as India has unilaterally diverted water.

It was learnt that the GK Pump House can not be put into operation when water level is below 4.27 metre at the pump house. For the three successive years water level dropped below that point and as such GK project remain inoperative.

Thus the GK Project authority could not irrigate 48,500 hectares crop land for high yielding Aus crop due to impact of Farakka Barrage. In the same manner, they failed last year incurring a loss of an estimated Taka 100 crore.

The impacts do not end here. Trucks rolled straight into the bed of the Padma through a brick soling constructed by Roads and Highway authorities for making easy movement of vehicles through Ferry Service.

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ally dried up as the GK Project main pump house fails to operate informed an engineer of WDB in charge of GK Pump house.

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The growers in rural areas said that they can no longer produce three crops in a year as they failed to plant Aus seedlings on time for want of irrigation and they were caught unaware of the worse situation. Other aspects of the situation is also countable. The number of jobless people who earlier depended on agriculture have increased manifold causing serious social unrest.

Meanwhile, a silent ecological catastrophe is taking shape in this area of Bangladesh as a result of unilateral withdrawal of Ganges water through Farakka on the other part of the border.

## India suspends work on road, BSF camp

From CHT Correspondent

RAMGAGH (Khagrachhari), May 21: The Indian side has agreed not to construct Border Security Force (BSF) camp and asphalt road on the encroached land in a flag meeting held last Monday at Sabrum in Tripura district of India.

Colonel Ashraf, Sector Commander of Khagrachhari of the Bangladesh Rifles headed this meeting who informed in his briefing the same day evening here that 1500 acres of land near the border from Fenichhora to Bhogabantila in Matiranga thana of the district, which was illegally occupied by India, would be kept 'standstill' till taking further decision suspending any construction on it.

The Indian side was headed by Dibus Negi of BSF in Tripura in the flag meeting which lasted six hours.

Several thousand people attended the meeting in front of the *Pourasava* and chanted slogans against the officials. Presided over by Awami League leader Afazuddin Ahmed, the meeting was also addressed, among others, by District Bar President Raisuddin, Press Club President Kamruzzaman Chowdhury, JSD (Inu) leader ATM Saleh and Gano Forum leader Kabir Ahmed.

Meanwhile, protesting the alleged corruption of the district officials the organisers will be a week-long signature campaign and mass-contact programme from Friday.

## Young man found dead in in-law's house

CHANDPUR, May 21: A young man was killed in his father-in-law's house at Naogaon village in Matlab thana of the district on Saturday, reports UNB.

Police suspected that Delwar Hossain, 25, of Paskipara of the same thana might have been killed by his in-laws following a family feud.

The body was sent to sadar hospital for autopsy. An Unnatural Death (UD) case was lodged with the police.

## No place for corrupt officials

SUNAMGANJ, May 21:

Local units of opposition political parties a civic meeting today demanded immediate withdrawal of 'corrupt' district officials, reports UNB.

The speakers charged the officials with misappropriation of money, blackmarketing fertilizers, negligence in duty.

"We shall be compelled to go for further agitation if the officials, including Deputy Commissioner, Civil Surgeon and sadar TNO, were not withdrawn or they take self-transfer," said Poura Chairman Mominul Moysine.

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Earlier, PCJSS, the umbrella organisation of the autonomy seeking insurgents of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Shantibahini, were demanding the unconditional release of

those who were freed after Jyotirmoy Chakma and Shuvadeb Chakma of Naniarchar, Uttam Kumar Chakma of Rangamati Sadar and Manabjyoti Chakma of Baghaichhari thana of the district.

Liaison committee arranges talks between the government and the PCJSS to find out a solution to the longstanding insurgency problem.

Local people said, despite the government ban, non-iodized salt is being sold in different parts of the greater Rangpur district by some whole sale dealers and retailers. A recent survey revealed that about 50 per cent whole sale dealers and retailers of the town do not abide by the government order.

Moreover, some dishonest businessmen are selling non-iodized salt with the label of iodized salt to earn extra profit.

According to a local estimate, about one lakh people are suffering from Iodine Deficiency Disorder (IDD) which is responsible for increase in post-natal death, maternal death, nervousness, deafness, physical deformation and also mental retardation.

The worst affected areas are Chilmari, Rowmari, Ulipur, Rajibpur, Fulchhari, Aditmari, Hatibandha, Kaliganj, Dimala, Kaunia, Jaldhaka, Gangachara and sadar thanas.

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According to police, Khairunnessa, 17, daughter of Yunus Gazi, 55, a worker of a bidi factory at Paran Bazar in the town, went to a nearby pond after sunset along with her little sister for washing utensils. Suddenly Jakir Hossain Gazi of nearby Ragunathpur village appeared, and dragged her to a nearby field and tried to violate her.

When her father, Yunus Gazi rushed to save her, Jakir beat him mercilessly and left the place also assaulting Khairun grievously.

The villagers rushed both the father and daughter to Sadar hospital where the attending doctors declared Yunus Gazi dead.

A case was lodged with the police and Jakir remained absconding since the incident.

Cracks developing in Chandpur town embankment

CHANDPUR, May 21: The town protection project is under threat as few cracks have developed in the embankment, following the lashes of tidal surge whipped by depression, reports UNB.

Some 25 families lost their homes in swelling water leaking through the breaches near the Puran Bazar and Natun Bazar areas of the town.

Meanwhile, local businessmen demanded immediate steps to save 15 mustard oil mills located in the Puran Bazar area, which are under threat of being engulfed.

When contacted, local officials of the Water Development Board entrusted with the town protection scheme, said they cannot drop concrete blocks where the erosion is taking place without the instruction of higher authorities.

Public Works Department and the Road and Highways Directorate were given priority in allocation of fund. The second preference was given to the Local Government Council, the Local Government Engineering (LGE), Forest, Soil Resources and Facilities Department as well as municipality in allocating and releasing fund.

The Public Works Department (PWD) has constructed the office and residence of the Deputy Commissioner and the District

Judge, Circuit House, development works in police department including construction of police line, construction of thana headquarters with health complexes, site development and construction of boundary wall of the proposed radio centre during the period.

The Road & Highways has been working towards connecting each union under communication 'net work' whereas the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) has implemented 297 projects in rural areas and cluster villages including construction of primary schools.

The Forest Department meanwhile from the beginning implemented afforestation project with a cost of taka 20 crore.

With the influx of Rohingya refugees in the country, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has implemented 33 projects with a cost of Taka 1.70 crore in communication, education and water supply in Naingkhongchari thana. The LGED has started constructing sluice-gate in Bandarban to facilitate the irrigation in the district.

## Kholahati Palli Unnayan Sangstha shows the way

From Our Correspondent

GAIBANDHA, May 21: Kholahati Palli Unnayan Sangstha, a voluntary organisation under Gaibandha sadar thana, has been working for the survival of destitute and landless peasants. The organisation generally serve for agriculture, credit facilities, cottage industries and small business.

The organisation has been functioning for quite some time. The founder president of the organisation, Kamrul Hasan Faruk of village Kholahati under Gaibandha sadar thana is a model farmer.

This year the organisation undertook a programme to erect vegetable gardens on a single decimal plot attached to each homestead of 200 landless families where they cultivated five different kinds of vegetables including brinjal, tomato, cabbage, radish, red-leaf etc.

The programme was introduced among the destitute and landless families each possessing a piece of land that remains fallow round the year. On implementing the plan each family will be able to earn an additional income of Tk 2,000 in five months' times. With a view to making the programme a success the organi-

sation supplied seeds and fertilizer free of cost. Nursing of all these gardens were done by the women of those families who were earlier trained.

This year Kholahati Palli Unnayan Sangstha was selected for the President's Award 1399 (BS) for outstanding contribution to agriculture sector erecting vegetables gardens on domestic plots.

When contacted, the president of Kholahati Palli Unnayan Sangstha informed this correspondent that if this programme is introduced widely, about 70 per cent destitute people of the country will be benefited using a portion of their homestead. Faruk further said that in 1991 he individually received President's Award on agriculture development, producing 152 maunds of paddy on a single acre of land.

Besides, the organisation distributed professional credit among 100 landless people. The organisation further extended training programme to 20 destitute female members for making mat so they would be able to maintain livelihood by selling their products. The organisation, meanwhile, introduced supplying of drinking water and mass education in the area.

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# A sure sign of desertification

From Our Correspondent

An official source said that a representative from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) visited Bangladesh in September 1986, prepared a draft study and submitted it to an International Conference on ecology held in Geneva in March 1987. But nothing so far was done in this regard.

KUSHTIA, May 21: Crop areas turned into arid land within GK Project command area, as no water was released through Farakka Barrage and with this phenomenon third successive Aus crop failure has become certain.

As a result, the expert apprehend, more than 1.2 crore acres of cultivable area in as many as 21 south western and northern districts of the country may turn into a vast expanse of desolate arid land.

Excessive withdrawal of water in the upper reaches of the Ganges has been increasingly lowering the moisture content of the soil, apart from non-operation of GK Pump house which feed biggest irrigation project of the country if water available in this part of the country, which a soil expert termed, is a sure sign of desertification. A study on the country's present condition of soil moisture indicated that it has gone down to the extreme and ground water level has gone far below due to non availability of Ganges water.

It has squeezed land and the volume of rabi crop production in greater Rajshahi, Pabna, Kushtia, Faridpur, Jessore, Khulna and Barisal districts will be affected to a great extent, the expert said.

Meanwhile, unilateral withdrawal of water has made the situation worse than ever imagined, said, Shofuddin Ahmed, Project Director of GK Project while giving data from 1988 that showed downward

trend in flows in Ganges. The last Bangladesh-India memorandum of understanding on Ganges water sharing expired May 31, 1988. Since then part of Bangladesh have had difficult dry seasons as India has unilaterally diverted water.

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