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Arsenic pollution in Bagerhat

More falling sick, medical team yet to be sent

By Shahrier Khan

Deadly arsenic pollution of sub-soil water is threatening the lives of thousands of people in Bagerhat and some adjoining districts, according to Public Health Department officials in Bagerhat reached over telephone.

One person, Anil Krishna Das, 60, and his son Shyamol Das, 22, of Fakirhat in Bagerhat died from arsenic poisoning on March 25 and August 1 respectively. Shyamol was earlier taken to Calcutta for treatment and doctors there found high levels of arsenic in his blood.

Following a series of complaints from people of Fakirhat thana and other areas of Khulna, the district Public Health Department (PHD) recently tested samples of water collected from 14 shallow tubewells in Fakirhat and Bagerhat thanas and detected serious arsenic contamination in five of these tubewells.

These tubewells have been sealed and local people advised to use water of deep tubewells only. No arsenic contamination was detected in the water of deep tubewells but their number is few in the region.

The local PHD has been instructed by the higher authorities to sink new deep tubewells wherever necessary to avoid the dire consequences of arsenic poisoning. Jamaluddin Ahmed Executive Engineer of the Department in Bagerhat told The Daily Star over the telephone

Yesterday. There are 2228 shallow tubewells and only 53 deep tubewells in the Fakirhat thana. The PHD is yet to take any step to test samples of water from most of these shallow tubewells.

Jamaluddin said that many people were found sick in different villages of Lockpur union, Bill Jong union, Nalda Moubogh union and Fakirhat union under Fakirhat thana.

Mohammad Reza, a resident of Fakirhat told The Daily Star over telephone that the government should immediately send a medical team in the area. He said he had personally visited some houses in those unions and found one or more sick persons at each of those.

Jamaluddin further said that reports of skin diseases which could be caused by arsenic poisoning had first drawn the attention of the PHD officials earlier this year. Such cases were also reported from Khulna district and it is assumed that arsenic pollution might have taken place also there.

Till July last, the only way of testing presence of arsenic in water was to send samples to the Atomic Energy Commission in Dhaka. After the higher authorities were informed of the matter the World Health Organisation (WHO) provided some equipment to the Khulna Public Health Department on July last for testing samples of water.

The PHD officials however could not say anything about the cause of the contamination. It can not be caused by industrial pollution, Jamaluddin said, "because there is no industry in the affected villages."

Moreover, we found no arsenic contamination in the water of different ponds in the affected areas," he added.

The Executive Engineer noted that the health department did not encourage the people to drink water from ponds as an alternative arrangement since those might spread water-borne diseases. "We are only encouraging drinking of water from deep tubewells," he said.

Meanwhile, Probe news agency, quoting a recent report published in Calcutta's leading Bangla daily Anandabazar Patrika, said that sub-soil water in seven districts of West Bengal in India was polluted with arsenic because of being exposed to arsenic-enriched rocks in the region.

One million people are suffering in those districts, bordering Bangladesh. Those include Asokenagar, Degana, Barupur and Dhapdhai.

The West Bengal government in its bid to fight arsenic pollution recently sought assistance from the World Bank (WB). Two World Health Organisation (WHO) experts are now working in West Bengal on behalf of the WB for a survey on arsenic pollution, the report said.

Kudrat-e-Khuda Commission Report needs modification

By Mizan Ali

The Kudrat-e-Khuda Commission Report (KCR) has to undergo some changes in view of the modern technological advancement and also take note of the changes in the basic principles of the state, before the recommendations of the report are implemented, observed some educationists and senior government officials.

The ruling Awami League, in its election manifesto, pledged "significant changes in the whole system of education in the light of the Kudrat-e-Khuda Shiksha Commission" report and promised a modern scientific education policy for the country.

The commission's report was based on the four basic principles of post independent Bangladesh — democracy, socialism, secularism and nationalism. "In all spheres of education, the successful reflection of the four principles of the state has to be ensured," the report recommended.

Abdullah Harun Pasha, Secretary, Ministry of Education said, "Some changes and modification are necessary in the report to tune it with time."

It was published in May 1974 during the first Awami League government in the post-independent Bangladesh and was known as Bangladesh Education Commission Report (BECR).

The chairman of the University Grants Commission, talking to The Daily Star said, "Some changes have to be made in the KCR to accommodate the need of the modern times."

Bangladesh College-University Teacher's Association

printed two editions of the abridged version of the commission report one in 1984 and the other in 1986.

Dr M Akhtaruzzaman, a DU senate member and teacher at the Botany Department told The Daily Star, that the "education policy should be made on the basis of principles laid down in the report taking into consideration the global changes and advancement made in various sectors during the last two decades."

Dr Zaman, who is also the president of Bangladesh College-University Teachers' Association said, "the government will have to distinguish between commercialisation of education and its privatisation."

The government has to play a vital role in the education sector by nationalising the educational institutions, he said. "This would not necessarily mean turning them into government institutions."

The education secretary said that the government was already very supportive to the non-governmental educational institutions and its support in the future would depend on some principles to be outlined by the government.

Demands for reform in the education sector has always remained the focal point in all the democratic movements of the country, the commission report mentions in its preface, adding "restructuring of the education system is the primary responsibility before the nation at this early stage of the independence."

PM: Fish Fortnight

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ested in nurturing the resources or increasing production.

"So we think that the water-bodies should be given to the genuine fishermen's organisations and the waterbodies will be distributed on the basis of the motto: the man with the net will be the possessors of water-bodies," she said assuring that the fisheries department would extend its technical assistance to the fisherman.

Though there are about seven lakh hectares of fallow waterbodies which are highly potential for pisciculture, Hasina said, the average fish production is lower in comparison to other fish-producing countries.

Shrimp has become an important resource of this country, shrimp and fish resources reached third position in earning foreign exchange, she said, adding that there are vast land for shrimp culture, but average shrimp output is lower.

Referring to marine fishing, the Prime Minister said production in this sector had increased, but a lot of resources in this sector remained intact for extraction.

"Our seafood need to be pro-

tected from the poaching by foreign fishermen," she said disclosing that riverine police and Coast-guard will be strengthened for this purpose.

Finance Minister Shah ASM Kibria said this government had laid emphasis on private-sector investment and would give importance to private initiative for increasing fish production.

Increase of fish production is not only important for nutrition but also important for income generation, he said inviting more private investment in this sector.

Earlier, the Prime Minister gave away awards to various personalities and organisations for their valuable contribution toward fish research and pisciculture in the country. The awardees included former vice-chancellor of Myemensingh Agriculture University Prof AKM Aminul Huq, Dr M Yusuf Ali, Maj (ret'd) Akhtaruzzaman MP, Alhaj Abul Kashem, Alhaj Nazir Ahmed and Bangladesh Television.

The Prime Minister inaugurated a fortnight fish exhibition at the BARC premises. She also released fish fry in the Ganobhaban lake on this occasion.

Review Taher murder case, JSD (Inu) urges PM

From Page 1

The Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD-Inu) yesterday assured Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina that they would extend their wholehearted support if her government sincerely took steps to rectify past misdeeds, reports UNB.

Exchanging views with her in the afternoon the JSD leaders advised the Prime Minister to combat terrorism which is essential for building the economy.

In the meeting, second in a row with the political parties, as a part of Prime Minister's move to take views of others in running the country, Hasina talked to the presidium members of JSD (Inu).

Sheikh Hasina held a similar meeting with the central leaders of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) on Saturday.

Dr Anwar Hossain, JSD president and member and brother of Col (Ret'd) Alhaj Taher, expressed his gratitude to Prime Minister Hasina for recognising valiant freedom fighter Taher for the first time.

The JSD leaders urged the Prime Minister to review the case of the killing of Col Taher.

Prime Minister Hasina, seeking cooperation and advice of political leaders, said the country ran out of track in last 21 years.

"We got an opportunity to serve the country and we will utilise every moment for the welfare of the people."

Stressing the need for a combined and united effort, Hasina reiterated that she wanted to do something for the people and to build the country.

Hossain. Asked why did he engage military personnel in political negotiations, avoiding his party people, he said, "I did not have politicians then."

He refuted reports that he had given money to any political party to encourage participation in the 1996 election.

The accusation that I had given financial support is totally wrong," he emphasised.

Ershad was critical of the 'role' of former army chief Lt Gen (ret'd) Nouruddin Khan when he stepped down from power. "I would have never gone to jail, Nouruddin could have played a better role," he said he had appointed Nouruddin as chief of army staff because he liked him, although he belonged to the Engineering Corps which was not a fighting corps.

He said he did not want to comment now on the role of former acting president Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed regarding his (Ershad's) being arrested and taken to jail after his fall. He, however, stated "There was tremendous pressure on Justice Shahabuddin 'for my arrest'."

In reply to other questions, the former president said he was not involved in any killings and that the Manzur murder case was initiated by former army chief Lt General A S M Nasim.

He was bitter about his army colleagues and said, "Everyone whom I trusted betrayed me. So many people took favour from me, but betrayed my trust."

Ershad said he was optimistic about the future. "I would never go back to jail. I am confident. I will get bail in all the cases. I have suffered a lot without having any fault."

Asked if he would make a mercy petition to the President, if he was not acquitted of the charges against him by the higher courts, he replied "I will not seek mercy. I could have done that before."

About his position on the August 15, 1975 incident the former army chief who later became president replied, "On that day I was in Delhi. I have great respect for Bangabandhu. But I could not do anything about the trial of the killers because there were strong pressure groups in my party."

He parried a question on 'differences' between him and his wife Roushan, who is also an MP, as reported in the press.

Ershad said there were lot of things he is going to say later, which will be published in his 'book'.

Asked if he has started work on his book, he replied, "I can not write now because I will need documents which are not with me."

About late president Ziaur Rahman, he said, "General Zia was nice to me. He did not trust others but trusted me."

Responding to another question about accepting an offer to leave the country, the former president said, "I will never go abroad. I am not afraid for my life. I will die on the soil of Bangladesh."



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Let's make things better

PHILIPS



Leader of the Opposition in Parliament and BNP chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia along with other party leaders placing wreaths at the mazar of Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman yesterday marking the founding anniversary of the party. — Star photo

By-election to Habiganj-2 Oct 15

By-election to Habiganj-2 constituency will be held on October 15. The Election Commission announced yesterday, reports UNB.

The parliament seat fell vacant with the death of ruling party MP Sharifuddin Ahmed on August 6.

According to the bypoll schedule, the last date of submission of nomination is September 16. The nomination papers will be scrutinised by the returning officer the following day.

The last date for withdrawal of candidature is September 23 while the voting will take place on October 15.

2 more cos listed with CSE

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Sept 1: Two more companies have been listed up in Chittagong Stock Exchange. According to a CSE source, these companies are: Eagle Star Textiles and Alltex Industries Limited.

With the listing of these two companies, the number of listed companies in CSE rose to 74.

Husband

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Bipul and Runa who hail from Pabna district, got married about one year ago following a love affair.

Police arrested Bipul and filed a murder case against him. The body was sent to the DMCH morgue for autopsy.

VC meets

From Page 1

legedly locked by BCL activists after they had "captured" the hall and closing of the road between the F Rahman hall and Mohsin hall which was made breaking the boundary wall after the occupation of Moshin hall by BCL.

JCD DU unit president A M B Mosarraf Hossain while talking to The Daily Star said, "We will continue our strike programme till the six-point demand is met."

Meanwhile, JCD yesterday exempted the cash session of the registrar building of the university from the strike for the day and for today for the collection of salary by the teachers and employees.

The BCL leaders in their meeting assured the acting VC all cooperation for restoring normalcy on the campus. They said they would welcome any decision taken by the VC for restoring congenial academic atmosphere in the university.

The Vice Chancellor requested the leaders of the GCO to mediate for holding a joint meeting of BCL, JCD and the university authorities. The GCO leaders told the VC they will let him know tomorrow if there is any progress in this regard.

After the meeting with the VC, the GCO leaders had informal talks with the leaders of JCD and BCL. Both the student groups accepted the proposal for a joint meeting. GCO leaders told this correspondent.

The VC, in his meeting with the DUTA leaders discussed the overall situation at the university. The DUTA leaders urged the VC to take immediate measures to flush out armed terrorists from the residential halls irrespective of their party affiliations and to resume classes and examinations as early as possible.

Later, the Dhaka University Syndicate at an emergency meeting yesterday sought the cooperation of all concerned to restore academic atmosphere on the campus.

The meeting was held at the VC house at 7:30 pm with the acting VC in the chair.

The members of the Syndicate urged the acting VC to go ahead with the process he had already started so that bonafide students of the halls could reside peacefully.

The meeting requested the VC to take necessary steps for removing the inconvenience caused by the closure of the administrative building, bank and the library due to the JCD called strike.

Fresh areas in Rajshahi, C'nawabganj flooded

From Our Correspondent

RAJSHAH, Sept 1: The overall flood situation in Rajshahi and Chapainawabganj districts has further deteriorated with the continued rise in the water levels of the Padma and Mohananda rivers.

More areas went under water in these two districts in the last 24 hours. Road communication between Chapainawabganj and Shibganj remains disrupted as the road is under water at several points.

The Rajshahi-Chapainawabganj highway is also under water near Haripur. The movement of heavy vehicles on the highway has been suspended from today.

According to the Chapainawabganj district administration sources, about 600 square kilometre area of the district have gone under water affecting about 70,000 people. Standing crops in 5704 hectares of land, 129 kms of kutch road, three kms of the flood control dam, nine culverts and 59 educational and religious establishments were damaged.

The District Relief office will distribute 58 metric tons of rice and Taka 41,000 in cash. The Ministry of Relief has allocated one metric ton of rice, 100 tins of biscuits and Taka one lakh.

In Rajshahi, more areas in Poba, Godagari, Bagha, Charchat, Bagmara, Rajpara and Mithar thanas have gone under water.

Trust newspapers to be privatised soon, JS told

The government would denationalise, as soon as possible, the state-owned newspapers with a view to ensuring free flow of information, State Minister for Information Prof Abu Sayeed told the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday, reports BSS.

In a written reply to a question from Zafur Islam Chowdhury (BNP-Chittagong), he said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had already made an announcement to this effect in her nation wide address on June 20.

Founding day

From Page 1

mazar of shaheed president Ziaur Rahman, the founder of the party, and offered feteiha.

She also inaugurated a photo exhibition at the art gallery of Shilpakala Academy in the morning.

Presided over by BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan the discussion meeting was addressed by A S M Mostafizur Rahman and Abdus Salam Tahukder. Dr S M Lutfor Rahman, Dr Saifur Rahman, Rezauddin Ahmed, Nazrul Islam Khan and Rezabudaula Chowdhury.

Pintu arrested

From Page 1

tively condemned the arrest of Nasiruddin Pintu and demanded his release within the next 24 hours. They also demanded the release of Shahiduddin Chowdhury Anney, the newly elected president of the JCD central committee.

UNB adds: BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan yesterday strongly condemned the arrest of the acting president of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), Nasiruddin Pintu.

In a statement, Mannan Bhuiyan said that the government had resorted to repressive measures against the BNP to establish a one-party rule.

He blamed the AL for carrying out torture and repression on BNP men to destroy the democratic process and eliminate the nationalist forces from the country.

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Printed & Published by A. S. Mahmud, Managing Director, on behalf of Mediaword Ltd, 52, Motijheel C/A, Dhaka-1000, from City Publishing House Ltd, 90, Kakrai, Dhaka-1000. Editorial, News & Commercial Offices: House No: 11, Road No: 3, Dhanmandi R/A, Dhaka-1205. PABX: 500092-4, Commercial: 500091 (Direct), Fax No: 88-02-863035, GPO Box No: 3257, Cable: DAILYSTAR, DHAKA. Email: dstar@bangla.net

BNP procession today

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) Dhaka city unit will bring out a colourful procession today from central office at Naya Paltan marking the 18th founding anniversary of the party. Dhaka city acting general secretary Kazi Abul Basheer requested all ward and thana units to join it from respective areas with processions, reports BSS.

Campaign banned

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tion meeting or join procession in byelection areas during the period.

Nobody will also be allowed to let loose terrorism or indulge in acts of indiscipline or intimidate those associated with byelection process.

Violators of the prohibition will be subject to two to seven years' imprisonment with fine.

The Commission has also imposed a total ban on playing of motorbike, autorickshaw, microbus, jeep, pick-up vans on roads and mechanised boat and speedboat in waterways from 6 am Tuesday till 6 am Friday in all the thanas where byelections will be held.

However, the restriction will not be applicable for the vehicles of contesting candidates, persons having legal identity cards, polling agents, election observers, journalists and polls officials and emergency services.

It also imposed a ban on carrying licenced arms from Tuesday midnight to Saturday midnight in the areas.

Finance Bill passed

The Jatiya Sangsad last night passed the Finance Bill, 1996 by voice vote in amended form to give effect to the financial proposals of the government, reports BSS.

The Bill, piloted by Finance Minister S A M S Kibria, will come into force with effect from July 1, 1996.

According to the amendments, sub-section (3) of Section 11 of the Income Tax Ordinance, 1984 has been substituted by a newly adopted text — "An accountant member shall be a person who is a commissioner of taxes or who has practiced professionally for a period of not less than eight years as a chartered accountant or cost and management accountant or who has practiced professionally for a period of not less than 20 years as an income tax practitioner within the meaning of Section 174 (2) (b)."

Dacoity at Khilgaon

By Staff Correspondent

Decoits reportedly decamped with valuables worth more than Tk 70 thousand from a house at Khilgaon in the city yesterday.

Mostafizur Rahman, an officer of Shilpa Bank and the owner of the house alleged that the decoits entered his house at 464 Khilgaon by breaking the lock and decamped with goods including gold ornaments, watches, Tk 11 thousand, three international passports, a number of prize bonds and share certificates.

Parliament tidbits

From Page 1

members remained vacant while the second sitting started with only six members of BNP and one of the Jamaat present and none sitting in the front row of the Opposition. Later, they were joined by Deputy Leader of the Opposition Prof Badruddoza Choudhury, former Speaker Shaikh Razzak Ali and some other BNP legislators, raising their number to 22.

All the Treasury bench members including Leader of the House Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina were seen laughing and thumping their desks for several minutes together after the Finance Bill was passed by voice vote. Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad and some other ruling party lawmakers were seen thumping their tables with both of their hands.

During the voice-vote, a single 'No' by a BNP legislator against a thunderous chorus of 'Yes' caused laughter in the House.

Speaker Humayun Rashid Chowdhury expressed his special thanks to Col (ret'd) Shawqat Ali, the Chairman of the JS Special Committee, for his troublesome task.

Chief Whip of the Sangsad, Abul Hasanat Abdullah rose to tell the Speaker in a lighter tone "You've shared only the Chairman of the committee and not its members like us."

A smiling Speaker responded, "I've given special thanks to all the members of

the committee through its Chairman."

As soon as the Speaker gave floor to Zinat Hossain to speak on her motion on the Finance Bill, most of the members were seen having their looks on the Jatiya Party MP. They stared at her so long Zinat spoke.

The ruling Awami League lawmakers shouted in protest when Maj (ret'd) Akhtaruzzaman stood up to demand the floor soon after the Speaker told the House that he would submit a complete report in the next session of the parliament on the BNP legislator's recent act of throwing abuses to the Chair.

The House was adjourned amid hue and cry by the angry Treasury bench members.

Soon after the adjournment announcement was made, several BNP lawmakers were seen going to the Treasury bench and talking to their colleagues there.

Former Speaker Shaikh Razzak Ali was seen talking to the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad, Commerce and Industries Minister Tofael Ahmed and others for quite sometime.

Like other days, most of the AL members were seen reading the daily — *Dainik Rupali* owned by their party MP Mostafizur Rahman. Another daily, *Dainik Al-Amin*, owned by AL lawmaker Maqbul Hossain, is also often seen on the desks of the Treasury bench.

'I failed as I was too soft'

From Page 1

trator. I could have learnt from her." He, however, added, "My party will never support BNP."

When a newsman pointed out that there was no last word in politics, he said, "Yes, you are right. But we will not support BNP. That is our thinking now."

Asked how long would Jatiya Party support the Awami League government, he replied "For the next five years". At one stage, he remarked that there was "more political symmetry" between his party and the BNP.