

# Fire incidents on rise

From Staff Correspondent

BARISAL, Jan 26: Fire incidents have increased alarmingly in Barisal division for the last two weeks, according to Fire Brigade and Civil Defence sources.

A total of 12 fire incidents took place in different districts under Barisal division that left one person roasted alive and injured at least 32 persons.

Almost all the fire incidents were originated from electrical short circuit, they added. Wealth including cash money and ornaments worth more than 1.50 crore taka were destroyed. The biggest fire incident occurred at Batajore Bandar area under Gournadi thana of Barisal district on January 14 where wealth of nearly one crore taka were burnt to the ashes with 30 shops and houses. The fire originated from electrical short circuit allegedly from a small garments factory.

It may be mentioned here that even after elevation of Barisal into a division, there are no fire stations or units at 9 out of 10 thanas of Barisal district.

Chief Whip Abul Hasanat Abdullah, MP, elected from Gournadi area visited fire ravaged Batajore Bandar on Friday.

He also assured that a fire brigade sub-station would be set up soon at Gournadi thana headquarters.

**Fertilizer being sold in black markets**

SHERPUR, Jan 26: Farmers of the district are facing problems due to acute scarcity and price hike of urea fertiliser for the last few weeks, reports UNB.

Local farmers alleged that most of the government appointed dealers were selling urea in the black market creating an artificial crisis.

Earlier, the government appointed 35 dealers in the district to distribute fertiliser at fair prices.

Taking the advantage of artificial crisis, a section of traders are selling urea between Tk 240 and Tk 250 per bag against Tk 186 fixed rate.

Another report adds: Some 76,000 hectares of land will be brought under rabi crops cultivation during the current season in the district, officials said.

54,200 hectares will be brought under Irri-Boro, 11,900 hectares under wheat, 3,470 hectares under mustard.

## Cold wave claims life of a woman in Pirojpur

From Staff Correspondent

BARISAL, Jan 26: Cold wave claims life of a woman at Sarail village under Bhandaria thana of Pirojpur district yesterday morning.

Witnesses and local people said, one Shahinur, 37, a malnourished very poor woman died at her dilapidated cottage in the village at about 8-30 am yesterday morning.

She had no woman clothes to protect herself from biting cold have - local sources said.

Cold wave like other places in the country also gripped southern districts decreasing the temperature gradually.

Minimum temperature was recorded in Barisal at 7 degree Celsius, according to Met office here.

# Unplanned approach road at Natakholah creating traffic congestion everyday

From Ranesh Maitra

PABNA, Jan 26: Traffic congestion at the newly shifted ferry ghat at Natakholah, gateway to north through road from eastern zone of the country, is worsening everyday as the Holy Eid-ul-Fitr is getting nearer.

Hundreds of trucks loaded with essentials carrying specially vegetables got stuck at the ghat, some waiting at least for five days before boarding a ferry.

The situation at the country's biggest ferry ghat, Aricha, was also grave as more and more vehicles started to queue at the terminal, mostly carrying passengers heading towards southern and northern parts of the country.

Sources at both the ghats apprehended that the situation may further deteriorate a few days before the Eid. No special measures were yet taken by the concerned authority to ease the traffic congestion at the terminals.

"We are in doubt whether we would be able to celebrate the Holy Eid-ul-Fitr, with our family and relatives living in Dhaka and Chittagong this year, like the previous years," said a number of businessmen of Pabna.

"It is really doubtful whether the entire traffic system between the eastern and northern districts would be faced with complete dislocation due to shoals appearing everyday in the Jamuna. The troubles and jams is being created at Aricha and Natakholah ghats specially due to extremely tottering condition of the temporarily built Natakholah-Nagorbari approach road."

Jahanara Begum, an old housewife of Shalgaria in Pabna town told the above on the same day when asked by The Daily Star how she was feeling about celebrating the Holy Eid. Her daughter and a son-in-law of Jahanara Begum are serving in Dhaka and they are expected to come to Pabna during the ensuing Eid-ul-Fitr.

Along with them, her grandchildren are also to come. Jahanara said, "Neither we nor the daughter and others are sure about meeting together during the festival."

"Traffic jams at the ferry ghats may spoil all their programmes," Jahanara expressed her grave doubt.

Baby Islam, a leading bus owner and President, Pabna District Motor Malik Group, told The Daily Star on Tuesday that thousands of bus and truck owners and employees of North Bengal and also from the eastern wing were in doubt whether they would be able to carry out their trips safely and timely.

"Unusual traffic jam continuing at Aricha was the reason for detaining their vehicles, specially the trucks for days together during this chilly winter. Fewer number of ferries were plying between Aricha and Natakholah. Due to the ex-

himself. Replying to some questions, the executive engineer, who joined here only two weeks back on transfer said that there was no reason to be so much apprehensive of traffic dislocation before or immediately after the Eid.

Nurul Islam said, "We are working day and night for the approach road, repairing the same and also widening the same from the existing 22 feet to 30 feet."

"In fact," the executive engineer continued, "whatever the traffic jam is experienced, it is actually found at Aricha and

Asked whether the approach road being a weak one would be able to bear the heavy traffic for long two years, Nurul Islam said, "To speak the truth, if there was no erosion of the road by the river Jamuna (as the approach road runs through the bank of the river) and if the trucks carry goods as per their capacity, it would run smoothly."

Explaining further, he said that BIWTA surprisingly allows trucks having capacity of 5 tonnes to carry even 20 tonnes of load and this causes harm to the road. He suggested that there should be strict observation by the BIWTC and other authorities concerned so that no vehicle with load about eight to 10 tons can cross the river till the construction of Kazirhat-Natakholah road was completed.

As regards the probable longevity of the approach road, Nurul Islam stressed the need for proper protection arrangements and for that he suggested expert-level survey as to what type of protective arrangements should be taken for overcoming the strong waves and current of the river Jamuna during the ensuing rainy season.

"For a meaningful protective arrangement for the approach road, expert survey was not only necessary but also a must, since this is the only route upon which the road traffic system between the two zones of the country mostly and sometimes entirely depends."

An executive engineer of the BIWTA, supervising the construction work of terminal at Natakholah, told The Daily Star that they would be able to complete the construction work of the terminal by June, 1997.

Abdullah-al-Mamun, general secretary, Natakholah Ghat Sramik Union said, "Traffic jams in Natakholah ghat take serious shape occasionally, not frequently. Heavy vehicles ply extremely slowly from Natakholah to Nagorbari on the one hand and from Nagorbari to Natakholah on the other. This causes jam."

Al-Mamun further said that jams are also created when less number of ferries ply or when larger number of ferries come. Lack of parking facilities, weak approach road sometimes causing accidents. Thus immediate

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Taking note of the above apprehensions prevailing among all sections of the people here, this correspondent visited Nagorbari and Natakholah ferry ghats on last Wednesday and found the damaged portions of the approach road to Natakholah was being repaired. When the correspondent reached the ghat, there was no traffic jam but within one and a half hours a severe traffic jam developed.

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