



Dhaka WASA always seems to be working at snail's pace. This ditch was dug out for a drain near the Shantinagar Crossing long before Eid and still remains under construction, posing a constant threat to the users of the road. — Star Photo

Daily demand 40 lakh gallons, supply 27 lakh gallons Acute water crisis in Comilla

COMILLA, Apr 2: People in the district are suffering from acute paucity of water and it is feared that a major portion of the current crop will be lost with the advent of dry season.

Four months of drought brought down the level of groundwater alarmingly and consequently most of the tubewells are now unfit to lift any water.

Abdul Malek, an official of the Comilla Pourashava, told APB that the daily demand for water is about 40 lakh gallons, but only 27 lakh gallons can be supplied at present since the pumps cannot lift sufficient quantity of water. The situation outside the municipality is even worse.

A source in the Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) said there are about

41,339 tubewells in the 12 thanas of the district. About 2,307 tubewells are now out of order and more than 5,000 tubewells can no longer lift water due to abnormal fall in the groundwater level. Of the 3,493 Tara tubewells only 87 are now in operation.

According to official sources there are 6,60,959 families in the district. If only the tubewells in operation are taken into consideration, there is only one tubewell to serve as many as 17 families, which is far below the requirement.

The authorities, in a bid to cope with the situation, took up a programme of sinking Tara tubewells, but the step did not yield the desired result. The authorities were now thinking of installing Super Tara tubewells.

Due to the prolonged drought even surface water has dried up the ponds, swamps and beels are now virtually without any water. The water levels of the Dakatia and Gumti rivers have fallen dangerously while Fakri, Ghunghur and other rivers have dried up completely. The low-lift pumps and power pumps installed on the banks of these rivers for the irrigation of Boro fields have no water to lift.

Most of the shallow tubewells cannot draw up sufficient quantities of water for irrigation. As a result, some enterprising farmers have dug deep holes and installed pumps at the bottom so that the groundwater level can be reached. The expense for such an undertaking, however, is beyond that of the average farmers.

Workers' Party to observe 'Protest Day' on Wednesday

By Staff Correspondent
Workers' Party will observe a "Protest Day" across the country on Wednesday to protest the killing of Jhenidah district unit leader Sirajul Islam Montu Master as well as terrorism in the country.

The decision to observe the protest day was taken on the first day of the 2-day politbureau meeting of the party.

In a resolution, the meeting said though the government has declared necessary measures for ensuring security of life of the people of south-western region after the killing of Kazi Aref in Kushtia, different armed gangs are still moving freely in the region.

The meeting said murder, kidnapping and other criminal activities are taking place one after another due to patronisation of the gangs by the administration and ruling party.

The politbureau meeting, claimed that a total of 19 Workers' Party leaders and activists were killed in this south-western region in the last four years but there still is no step from government side to check the situation.

The meeting demanded immediate arrest and exemplary punishment of those responsible for the murder of Montu Master.

Mannan Bhuiyan says Govt trying to protect culprits of Atrai killings

BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan has condemned the "government design to protect the culprits of Atrai killings by diverting the incident in a separate stream," reports UNB.

In a statement yesterday, he demanded exemplary punishment of the murderers, expressing concern over the gruesome killing of two Awami League leaders.

"But we are shocked to notice that some ministers and ruling party leaders are trying to fish in troubled water by implicating BNP education affairs secretary Alamgir Kabir in the case," he said.

Due to this evil effort, Bhuiyan said, the real killers will be encouraged to continue such murders one after another. "The process to save killers of even ruling party leaders will further deteriorate the law and order situation."

The BNP secretary general said Awami League government

should realise that a situation like that of 1972-75 period is prevailing in the country. Ruling party terrorists are not only killing BNP men, but also their own leaders, he added.

He pointed out that bombs are being made at the houses of MPs of the ruling party to "kill political opponents." But the government is trying to shift the responsibility to the opposition parties. "The consequences will not be good," he warned.

"The reason of sharp rise in the incidence of killing, attack and terrorism is not only the government failure, but also the conspiracy to hold the opposition responsible for its evil political design."

The BNP leader urged the government not to misguide investigation into the killings like those in Atrai and mislead the process of justice. He called for finding out the real killers and ensuring punishment for them.



NCCBL executive dead

By Staff Correspondent

Mohammad Ali, an executive vice-president and secretary of National Credit and Commerce Bank Ltd (NCCBL) died of cardiac arrest at his residence in the city late on Thursday night. He was 57.

Son of late Munshi Azizul Haq, Mohammad Ali was born on March 10 in 1942 at village Motabi in Feni district. He was the brother-in-law of veteran freedom fighter of Chittagong Shahjahan Khan and brother of FIFA referee Z Alam.

Late Mohammad Ali started his banking career in 1962 through joining the then National Bank of Pakistan. Later he joined the then Eastern Banking Corporation and served as public relations officer for a long time in the newly floated Uttara Bank.

In 1985, he joined in National Credit Limited (currently NCC Bank) as vice president. He discharged his duties as executive vice president of the NCCBL till his death.

He worked as sports reporter for a long time in Dainik Parbadish. After the independence of Bangladesh, he discharged important duty at the Ministry of Information on deputation. Besides, he was associated with various socio-cultural organisations.

He left behind wife, three daughters and a host of relatives and friends.

The qukhwan of Mohammad Ali will be held at Jatuya Press Club tomorrow (Sunday) at 5 pm. Relatives, friends have been requested to attend the function.

2 Bangladeshi fishermen shot dead in Sathkira

SATKHIRA, Apr 2: Two Bangladeshi fishermen were shot dead and two fishing boats were taken away by pirates from Raimongal River in the Sundarban under Shyamnagar thana here recently, reports BSS.

The pirates said to be Indians attacked a group of Bangladeshi fishermen in the river at Kashikata area in the Sundarban while they were returning home after fishing. The pirates fired the fishermen.

Cunningham tells house US companies keen to invest more in Bangladesh

US Congressman Randy Duke Cunningham, an influential member of the powerful House Appropriation Committee has said the democratic government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is "seeking to improve the economic wellbeing of its people," a message received in the city yesterday said, reports BSS.

Making a statement at the House of Representatives on March 26 last on the occasion of Bangladesh's Independence and National Day Cunningham said the government's basic goal is to achieve economic growth with equity and social justice.

The US congressman said that Bangladesh is a land of unique opportunity for the high-tech companies of the United States with its enormous hydrocarbon resources.

Cunningham also said Sheikh Hasina's government believes in open market economy that facilitates foreign investment and several US companies have already invested 500 million US dollars in the country adding "several billions more are in pipeline."

The Republican congressman from the state of California also said that the key elements of the present government's economic policies focus on poverty alleviation and education with emphasis on improvement of women's economic and social status, financial and monetary discipline, strengthening of democratic institutions through legal and administrative reforms.

"Transparency and accountability in administration, liberalisation of trade, dismantling of arbitrary regulatory constraints and creating an enabling environment for private domestic and foreign investments are also high on the present government's economic agenda," Cunningham added.

1 killed, 20 hurt as bus skids off Dhaka-Sherpur highway

SHERPUR, Apr 2: A 13-year-old boy was killed and 20 others were injured when a Sherpur bound bus from Dhaka skidded off to a roadside ditch near Balaipur, 1 km off the town, on Dhaka-Sherpur highway today, reports UNB.

The victim was identified as Arafat. He was going to Sherpur to attend a marriage ceremony.

Witnesses said the speeding bus of Ananda Service fell into a roadside ditch at about 10:30 am when the driver lost control of steering in an attempt to save a tempo and a cow.

Critically injured eight passengers were rushed to Myensingh Medical College Hospital while the others admitted to Sherpur hospital.

A case was registered with Sherpur police in this connection.

Poll shows Yeltsin's popularity plummets to 6 per cent

MOSCOW, Apr 2: President Boris Yeltsin's popularity rating down to 6 per cent, while nearly two-thirds of Russians approve of his prime minister, according to a poll released Friday, reports AP.

Ninety-two per cent of respondents said they did not support Yeltsin, while only 6 per cent said they supported him, according to the All-Russian Centre for Public Opinion, a leading independent polling service. The survey was cited by the Interfax news agency.

Prime Minister Yegheny Primakov's approval rating was at 64 per cent, while 25 per cent said they disapproved of him.

Pollsters surveyed 1,600 Russians on March 27-30 for the poll, Interfax said. It had a margin of error of 4 per cent.

The report did not give comparative figures for previous polls. Yeltsin's popularity has swung wildly over the years, but has been waning recently because of his frequent illnesses and several political scandals.

His opponents in the lower house of parliament have prepared impeachment charges against him and are scheduled to vote on them April 15. Even if the vote succeeds, Russia's two top courts and upper house of parliament must also approve the motion, which is considered unlikely.

Primakov has been consistently popular since his appointment in September. He insists he has no presidential ambitions, though his supporters have encouraged him to run in the next elections, scheduled for mid-2000.

37 missing crew of sunken DPRK ship feared dead

SEOUL, Apr 2: Thirty-seven North Koreans missing after their freighter collided with a South Korean container ship off Sri Lanka two days ago are all feared dead, shipping officials said today, reports AFP.

"We received a report that they could not find any more survivors or bodies at the site," said a spokesman for Hyundai Merchant Marine Co which operated the South Korean vessel.

"There has been no word from the North Korean side," he said adding that insurance company officials were headed to the Sri Lankan capital Colombo to investigate the incident.

The 52,000-tonne Hyundai Duke crashed into the 7,000-tonne North Korean freighter Manopok between Sri Lanka and Sumatra late Wednesday.

Two North Koreans were rescued by the Hyundai Duke but 37 others were missing after their vessel went down immediately.

The Hyundai Duke, which sustained minor damage in the collision, searched for survivors until late Thursday before it handed over the operation to another Hyundai vessel and left for Colombo for repair.

Mahathir responds to \$25m defamation case against him

KUALA LUMPUR, Apr 2: Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has filed his statement of defence against the \$25 million defamation suit brought against him by his former protégé, Anwar Ibrahim, reports AP.

The sacked deputy prime minister claimed in his suit that Mahathir slandered him at a press conference on Sept 22.

In his defence, Mahathir said that the alleged defamatory words were prime ministerial and that he wanted to make his reasons for dismissing Anwar known, and he contended that Anwar was not entitled to any damages. He asked the court to dismiss the suit.

Mahathir said that he spoke with an "honest belief in the truth" and that his statements were not made recklessly, without disregard for the truth or untruth of the words.

Mahathir also denied that the offending words were calculated to disparage Anwar.

Mahathir shocked this Southeast Asian nation and international observers when he graphically described Anwar's alleged acts of sodomy, a

crime in mostly Muslim Malaysia.

A verdict in Anwar's corrupt practices trial is expected on April 14. He is accused of abusing his power to cover up sexual misconduct. Anwar says the charges were trumped up to ruin his political career.

Anwar said that the defamatory words were published in the Sun newspaper under the headline "Anwar's behaviour despicable: PM," which was widely circulated in Malaysia.

They were also published in Newsweek magazine's Oct 5 issue under the title "Hearts Mud in Your Face—Accusations of sexual misconduct." Offending words were also televised widely by CNN International and other broadcasters worldwide.

He claimed that their publication did grave injury to his character, credit and reputation both nationally and internationally.

Anwar has until April 5 to reply to Mahathir's defence. Anwar, who was sacked on Sept 2, is also suing Sun Media Corporation for \$125 million.

North Korea relocating 2m people to its countryside

SEOUL, Apr 2: North Korea is relocating two million people from its capital and other cities to the countryside in an apparent attempt to add workers to its battered farm industry, South Korea's main spy agency said today, reports AP.

The forced migration, which began last year under a five-year programme, will eventually affect more than eight per cent of the isolated communist state's population, said Lee Jong-chang, head of the National Intelligence Service.

Lee made the remarks in a parliamentary hearing held behind closed doors. The remarks were later distributed in a news release from the spy agency.

Half of those to be relocated are dwellers in Pyongyang, the capital, which has a population of 3 million, Lee said. Another one million will be moved from provincial cities, he said.

North Korea regularly relocates its people to control population and provide badly needed labour in farm regions.

But Lee said the latest migration marked the largest ever monitored by his agency.

Most of the migrants are jobless people, ex-convicts, reprimanded government officials and people who have relatives in the countryside, he said.

The mass move came as North Korea was trying to revive its farm industry, which UN relief officials say has ground to a halt because of a

lack of fuel and equipment and hungry farm workers.

The relocation also helps Pyongyang's Shinyong regime lessen the potential for unrest in its politically sensitive capital and other cities, agency officials said.

North Korea has been largely dependent on international food aid to feed its people since 1995. Food shortages caused by inefficient communal farming techniques have been aggravated by years of disastrous weather.

After visiting North Korea in August, a US congressional delegation said up to two million people may have died of starvation and famine-related illnesses since 1995.

Despite a tight state control on travel, up to 200,000 North Koreans have deserted their rural villages in recent years to find food in cities, agency officials said.

Many of those vagrants were moving to the north to look for chances to escape to China, where they hoped to find work and food as illegal immigrants, the spy agency said in a separate news release.

North Korea has established camps to hold these people and increased public executions to control rising crimes, it said.

Various reports said that more than 100,000 North Koreans live in hiding in China since escaping their famine-stricken homeland.

Chopper crash on Tajik border: 18 Russian guard killed

DUSHANBE, Apr 2: At least 18 Russian border guards died today when their helicopter crashed in the former Soviet republic of Tajikistan near the border with Afghanistan, a Russian military official in Dushanbe said, reports Reuters.

A Moscow-based spokesman for the Federal Border Guard Service said later at least three top officers of Russia's Tajik Border Guard Group had been on board and died in the accident, which happened 200 km south of Dushanbe, the Tajik capital.

"Radio contact with the helicopter was lost 35 minutes after take-off. It fell into the Pyandzh river," the Moscow-based spokesman said.

The reasons for the crash of the Mi-8 transport helicopter were not immediately known, but a source said Russia briefly halted the use of the Mi-8 model two years ago after a string of accidents which claimed dozens of lives.

Russian troops have been guarding the Tajik-Afghan border since the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, which pitched Tajikistan into a devastating six-year civil war. The war ended in 1997 with a peace deal between the Moscow-backed secular government and the Islamist opposition.

Libya likely to open diplomatic mission in the Netherlands

AMSTERDAM, Apr 2: Libya has asked the Netherlands for permission to open a diplomatic mission in connection with the forthcoming Lockerbie trial, the foreign ministry said today, reports Reuters.

"They have indeed made that request (to open a diplomatic mission), and it is linked with the trial," a ministry spokeswoman told the agency.

Libya has no diplomatic mission in the Netherlands at present, she said, adding Libya's wish had been prompted by the desire to offer consular support to the two men suspected of involvement in the Lockerbie bombing.

"They want to have a branch here ... and given we have always had diplomatic links with them, even when they had no embassy in the Netherlands, that is not unusual. We have an embassy in Tripoli as well," she said.

It was impossible to say how long it would take for the mission to be officially opened, she said, adding the usual procedures to establish such an office would be applied. The diplomats would have diplomatic immunity, she said.

New drive to teach patriotism in China

BEIJING, Apr 2: Turning to patriotism to replace the fading appeal of communism, China is building 51 centres around its capital to promote a sense of national loyalty among school children, state-run media said Friday, reports AP.

The centres — called "patriotic bases" — include museums and monuments commemorating such facets of the national past as Communist Party-led resistance to the Japanese invasion of 1931-45, the official Xinhua News Agency said.

Middle schools in Beijing and elsewhere in the country have also held special camps during summer and winter vacations where students learn patriotism, the report said.

China first began its patriotic education campaign in the early 1990s to combat the disillusionment with communist rule, vividly demonstrated by the pro-democracy protests of 1989, which were brutally crushed in Beijing's Tiananmen Square.

The Communist Party is also trying to give itself a new basis of legitimacy since casting aside the old goal of classless utopia in favor of free market reforms. The party wants youngsters to know it was responsible for unifying China and leading its emergence as a world power.

Schools have been ordered to do their part to ensure that children learn patriotism and love of the party along with every subject.

Russian FM to visit Iran in May

MOSCOW, Apr 2: Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov will visit Iran next month to discuss expanding trade and the crisis in Kosovo, a news report said Friday, reports AP.

In a telephone conference earlier this week, Ivanov and his Iranian counterpart Kamal Kharrazi called for an end to the NATO airstrikes on Yugoslavia, saying they violated international law. Russia has heretofore opposed the bombings.

Ivanov will go to Iran in May on Kharrazi's invitation, the Interfax news agency reported, without giving exact dates.

Ivanov is expected to press for increased trade and economic cooperation with Iran, the report said.

Russia has come under heavy criticism from the West for its help in building a nuclear reactor in Bushehr in southern Iran. The United States fears that Russia's assistance will help Iran develop a nuclear bomb, which Moscow denies.



Bangladesh Democratic Party brought out a procession in the city yesterday to protest the killing of Kosovo Muslims by Serbian forces recently in Yugoslavia. — Star Photo

Young man killed, 10 hurt in clash in Gaibandha

GAIBANDHA, Apr 2: A young man was killed and ten others were injured in clashes in Saghata and Sundarganj thanas of the district, police said today, reports UNB.

Eight others were arrested in connection with the killing, clashes and arson attack last Sunday and Wednesday.

Police and local people said a businessman of Jumarbari market, Mahbubur Rahman, took electric connection from a nearby cinema hall and on the Eid day the owner of the hall cut off the line.

It fuelled an altercation and a chase and counter-chase between the two sides. Police brought the situation under control.

An arbitration meeting was convened Wednesday. Rabbani, 32, was killed and six others were injured in attack allegedly by the cohorts of the hall owner on their way to the meeting. Police arrested the hall owner and five of his accomplices.

Govt to face united movement, says Ershad

Jatiya Party chairman H M Ershad Friday said the government is to face a united movement due to its unlimited failures, arrogance and political mistakes, reports UNB.

There is no alternative to ousting this government from political stability in the country," he told women leaders of his party at its Baridhara office while reviewing the country's present political situation.

Begum Rawshan Ershad, who also addressed at the meeting, was entrusted with the responsibility of reorganising the central committee of Jatiya Mohila Party.

Former MP Nuri Hasna Laila Chowdhury, Begum Sultana Zaman Chowdhury, Prof Suraya Akhtar Siddique, Jolly Rahman, Farida Sikdar, Ferdousi Islam and Begum Jahannara Mukul were present at the meeting.

Dainik Barta trustee board meet held

From Our Correspondent

RAJSHAHI, Apr 2: An emergency meeting of the Trustee Board of the Dainik Barta, the only national daily from the north Bengal, expressed grave concern over the deleting of the name of the daily from the media list of the government and withdrawal of newspaper quota allocated for it without assigning any reason.

The meeting requested the government to review the decision and said that such a decision would threaten the publication of the daily.

Sale of sub-standard drugs on the rise in Barisal

BARISAL, Apr 2: Sale of sub-standard and fake medicines is reported to be rampant in Barisal, Patuakhali, Barguna, Jhalakathi, Bhola and Pirojpur under Barisal division, reports APB.

Most of these questionable drugs are allegedly produced by pharmaceutical companies which have mushroomed recently in the areas. The adulterated medicines are sold mainly in the outskirts of the district towns and the villages.

Many of these drugs are allegedly contaminated by fungus, moss and even contain dead flies and insects. Locals doubt whether these new companies possess authentication from concerned authorities or are registered.

They want the local drug control authorities to take stringent measures against these companies before more lives are endangered.

Informed sources allege that many unscrupulous physicians prescribe the low-quality drugs produced by these companies in lieu of "commissions".

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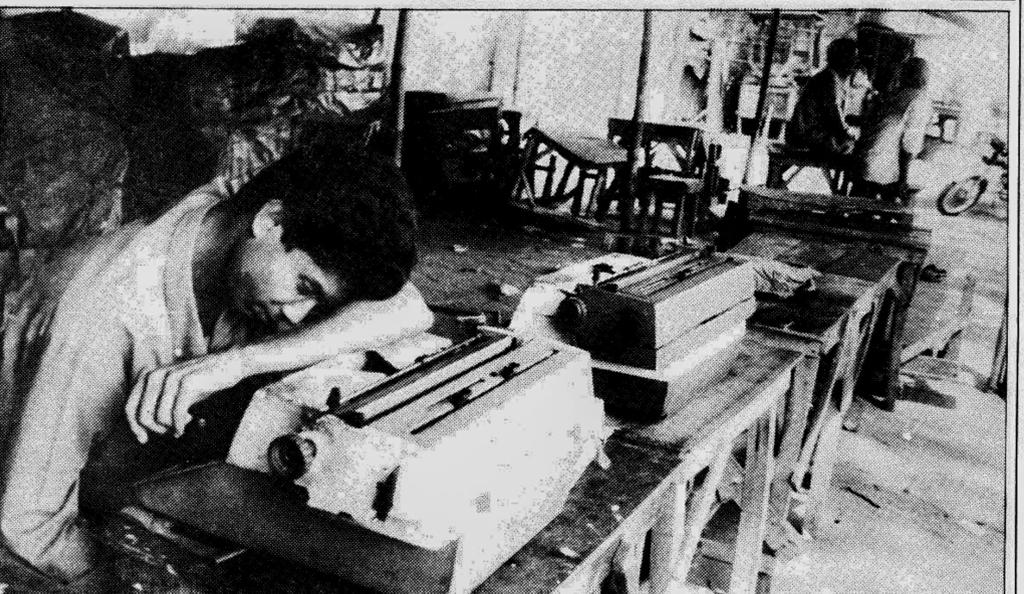
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Critically injured eight passengers were rushed to Myensingh Medical College Hospital while the others admitted to Sherpur hospital.

A case was registered with Sherpur police in this connection.



The air of festivity still seems to linger in the city and the return of people to work is yet to gain momentum. This young man sitting with a typewriter in front of the Press Club fall asleep on his machine yesterday while waiting for prospective clients who don't seem to be anywhere around. — Star Photo