

National
A grim battle for survival

Erosion turns most farmers of coastal belt into fishermen

News snaps

Jail Killing Day observed

MYMENSINGH, Nov 10: Jail Killing Day was observed here on November 3, reports BSS.

Syed Nazrul Islam Smriti Parishad arranged elaborate programmes here in observance of the day. The programme began with a mourning procession, which was brought out from "Krishnachura Chattr" at Mymensingh Rail Station in the morning. The procession paraded the main streets of the town and ended at the college road residence of Shahid Syed Nazrul Islam. The Smriti Parishad also organised a 'milad mahfil' in the premises of Shahid Syed Nazrul Islam College in the morning. Political leaders, principal, professors and students of the college attended the 'milad mahfil'.

Wheat sanctioned for 100 schemes

CHUADANGA, Nov 10: The government has sanctioned 386 tons of wheat under test relief programmes for implementing over 100 schemes in all the four thanas and four pourasabhas of the district in the current financial year, reports BSS.

According to an official source, 85 tons of wheat have been sanctioned for Sadar thana, 104 tons for Alamdanga thana, 92 tons for Damurhuda thana, 69 tons for Jibannagar thana, 18 tons for Chuadanga Pourasabha, 07 ton for Alamdanga Pourasabhas, 08 ton for Darshana Pourasabha and 03 ton for Jibannagar Pourasabha. The implementation work of the schemes has begun.

Road development progressing

MANIKGANJ, Nov 10: The local Government Engineering Department (LGED) has been developing the Jhitka-Machain road at cost of Taka 1.88 crore in the current fiscal year, reports BSS.

Official sources said the implementation of the development work taken under the second road and market development and maintenance project is progressing satisfactorily. Under the project 9 kilometres road is being developed with bitumen-carpeting. More than 15 per cent of the work has already been completed and the rest will be implemented by January, 2000.

Two brothers robbed

PATUAKHALI, Nov 10: Two brothers were robbed of Tk 19,500 and a gold chain at Uttar Dharandi launch ghat in Sadar thana on Sunday, reports UNB.

Police said a group of extortionists swooped on the two brothers — Farooque Hossain and Noor Hossain — as they did not comply with their earlier demand for toll. They were admitted to sadar hospital. The muggers demanded a large chunk of money from Farooque as he returned from Malaysia a few days back.

Series of robberies

NARAIL, Nov 10: In a string of robberies, bandits looted valuables from 20 houses at three villages in Sadar thana on Sunday night, reports UNB.

Police said the robbers stormed the houses at Pachuria, Chanditala and Srifaltala villages at the dead of night and looted valuables, including gold ornaments. The houses looted at Chanditala village belong to Rabin Pal, Polin Pal, Gohinda Pal, Bhakta Pal, Niranjana Pal, Arbinda Pal and Bimol Shaha while those at Srifaltala village belong to Atiar Sheikh and Motiar Molla. Two people were critically injured as the bandits beat them up during the robberies. Villagers alleged that the police of Agadia-Richal outpost, close to the villages, could not reach the spot in time.

Immunisation Day observed

COMILLA, Nov 10: More than eight lakh and forty thousand children in the age group of one to five were immunised here on the sixth National Immunisation Day last week, reports BSS.

According to official sources, 22 thousand health personnel including some volunteers administered the polio vaccine. As part of the immunisation programme all the children will be served Vitamin-A capsules during the second round of immunisation drive on December 2. Civil Surgeon Dr. Mukhlesur Rahman administered polio vaccine in different centres.

Training of Ansars, VDP

TANGAIL, Nov 10: A 14-day training course for Ansars and VDP members concluded on Saturday in the district Ansar and VDP office premises, reports BSS.

A total of 100 Ansars and VDP members took part in the course. The course included physical exercise, public security, child and mothers' health care, social discipline, maintenance of security in election centres and disaster management. Nirmalendu Biswas, District Adjutant of Ansars and VDP, presided over the concluding function.

Smuggled sarees seized

BAGERHAT, Nov 10: Coast guards seized a huge quantity of smuggled sarees from two engine boats and arrested three boatmen in this connection from the Pashur river on Sunday, reports UNB.

On suspicion, a patrol team of Mongla Coast Guard halted the two boats near Chalna Bazar in Dacpo thana of Khulna district on Saturday morning and recovered 17 bundles of Indian sarees worth about Tk 20 lakh. The arrested were identified as Selim, Nur Alam and Halder. They were handed over to police along with the seized boats and sarees.

Five robbers arrested

BAGERHAT, Nov 10: Five armed dacoits were rounded up from a house in village Zaria Kahartanga under Fakirhat thana on Sunday night, reports UNB.

Those arrested are Ruhul Quddus 30, Inam 28, Saurav Haoladar 25, Humayun Kabir 30, and Abul Kalam, 30. Some others managed to flee. Acting on a tip-off, police raided the house of Ruhul Quddus at 10.30 pm when the gang was preparing for committing a dacoity. Sensing the arrival of police, the dacoits fired four blank shots. Police returned the fire but none was injured.

Shortage of judges

CHITTAGONG, Nov 10: Due to acute shortage of judges, the number of pending cases has been increasing day by day in the port city hampering the judicial process, reports UNB.

There are only five judges for some 35 lakh people of the metropolitan city and nearly 25,000 cases were pending in the courts for long.

The sanctioned posts of metropolitan magistrate for the port city are six as against 22 metropolitan magistrates in capital Dhaka for almost the same number of cases.

Court sources said the number of pending cases in six thanas of the port city was 17,000 in 1998, which increased to 25,000 this year.

The area of the metropolitan city has been increased to 120 square miles from 60 square miles. The government also decided to increase the number of thanas to 12.

Valuables looted

PATUAKHALI, Nov 10: Bandits stormed a house at Muradia village in Dumki thana Sunday night and looted valuables worth about Tk one lakh, reports UNB.

Witnesses said a group of 10-12 robbers broke into the house of one person named Nazrul Islam at dead of night and looted the valuables. Villagers, however, surrounded the robbers while they were decamping with the booty but the armed miscreants fled the scene exploding bombs, injuring two people — Kamal, 30, and Mannan, 28. They were admitted to sadar hospital in critical condition.

Drug smuggling on rise

MANIKGANJ, Nov 10: Drug smuggling has become a huge criminal business, giving an alarming rise to drug addicts, reports UNB.

According to competent sources, there are at least 500 spots of illegal drug trading in seven thanas of the district and most of these are located in the town. They said various kinds of hemp, drugs and wine, spirit and heroin are smuggled here from India and Nepal. Smugglers supply the contraband to various parts of the country by buses, trucks, trains and river vessels but police can hardly take action against them.

50 lakh deprived of medicare

NETRAKONA, Nov 10: While the government is carrying out a campaign to ensure 'Health for All by 2000', some 50 lakh people are being deprived of medicare service, reports UNB.

The 50-bed sadar hospital is grappled with numerous problems like mismanagement, shortage of beds, medicine, physicians and medical appliances. On average 600 patients rush to the hospital everyday for admission, but the authorities can admit only a few of them and those who are admitted have to huddle together on floors for lack of beds. The laboratory of the hospital remained inoperative for a long time, forcing poor patients to get their laboratory tests done at private pathological centres. More alarming is that the hospital even has no life-saving drugs, which it regularly gets from the government.

SANDWIP, Nov 10: Nurul Alam is fighting a losing battle against the Meghna. His homestead in the island town of Sandwip is about to disappear into the turbulent river. This is the third time the 60-year-old businessman is looking for a new land to build a new home after the previous ones devoured into the river along with a brick house and fruit trees.

"We have already started moving our household things elsewhere," said Jewel Rana, one Alam's seven children.

"Workers will soon start dismantling our house," said Rana pointing to the house, where he spent most of his 18 years. The threatened home took the young man down the memory lane.

"This is where I lost two of my nieces during the 1991 cyclone," said Rana in a broken voice.

Like Rana, most other families living at his Harishpur village are busy in shifting their houses to safer places as the river becomes destructive.

Continuing erosion by the river has been changing the map of the island, that emerged from the Bay of Bengal about 3,000 years ago. Although there is no official statistics, local people observed that about one fourth of the island has already been devoured by the Meghna during the last few decades.

Before being victims of erosion, almost all of them were farmers. Now most of them

have switched over to fishing and fighting a grim battle for survival.

Unabated erosion is also threatening Hatiya and Manpura islands in the confluence of the mighty river and the Bay of Bengal.

The erosion is causing untold sufferings to the islanders, who are either fishermen or farmers. Dwelling houses and farmlands apart, several government offices at Sandwip, Hatiya and Manpura, disappeared into the river.

About 75 per cent of the islanders do not have any land for homesteads and most of them are landless.

Not only are they subjected to vagaries of nature, they suffer in the hands of Jotdars or owners of big land. Using hired armed musclemen these landless forced newly settled landless families to surrender part of their harvests. They also condemn them to a harsh regime of share-cropping in violation of laws.

Relations between Jotdars and these people are not warm. Rivalries from Jotdars for controlling new shoals often result in violent clashes. As a result, huge areas of khas land identified by the administration could not be distributed.

Almost isolated from civilisation, people living in the far flung off-shore islands live their lives almost in medieval conditions. They do not have a

police station, not to speak of civic amenities like schools, healthcare, post offices and phones.

Development works are a far cry in the islands. There is only one embankment in Nijhum Dwp and none in Urir Char to protect the land from salinity. Almost a similar situation exists in most of the islands of Char Kukri Mukri, Char Patila, Dhala Char, Char Nizam, Char Motahar, Char Zahiruddin and Nijhum Dwp.

A recent visit of some journalists to some of the off-shore islands like Sandwip, Hatiya, Nijhum Dwp and Manpura revealed how vulnerable the people are in these unprotected off-shore islands.

The study was conducted to assess the impact of cyclone on the coastal belt and the measures taken to save life and property in the region.

Poor transportation in most of the off-shore islands has been causing great hardship to the people. Lack of good transports block growth of trade and commerce.

There is hardly any paved roads in the islands and the number of kutcha roads are also very inadequate. In most places, there is no connecting roads between cyclone shelters and human habitations and the existing ones are also very poorly constructed.

Boats and travelers ferry people from one place to an-

other. When the river is rough they can not travel to the mainland. There is no communication system between the shoal areas and the thana sadar.

Economic life of the people is being crippled greatly due to continuous erosion as well as lack of infrastructural facilities including the transportation system. The mainstay of transportation between the island and the mainland is the sea truck.

A small sea truck operates once a day between Hatiya and Char Jobbar. But very often it gets out of order and stuck up in the middle of its way mainly during the low ebb stranding passengers.

To make the communications easy, residents want the government to construct a road through Bayar Char that emerged between Char Jobbar and Hatiya. Considering the importance, the local government approved the project recommending development of a 20-km road which they said would reduce the distance at least by 50 per cent.

"The fate of the island will never change unless the communications system is improved," said a local businessman, who runs his shop at Hatiya Steamer Ghat. "The erosion has shattered the dream of the islanders he said adding 'I am also making preparation to move my shop at a new site'."

Not only the shopkeeper, almost all other inhabitants near the ghat have started removing their business and goods to escape erosion.

About 20,000 families have already been left homeless by the erosion. They demanded immediate rehabilitation in government khas land and new islands emerging in the sea.

There are some 44,000 acres of khas land in the district where these victims could be rehabilitated. Huge land is rising from the sea" said a fisherman urging government to rehabilitate the erosion victims in the new lands which he said could bring a great relief to the people.

The islanders are allegedly harassed by forest officials as the allotment of land is a complicated business.

"For cultivation, we have to pay the forest people some Tk 300 for each acre of land and a handsome amount for housing," said an inhabitant of the island against whom a number of cases were filed by the Department of Forest.

The islanders depend much on sea fish. Hundreds of tons of fish are caught, rotting is common for lack of cold storage.

Fishermen take loan from wealthy people to buy fishing nets, boats and foodstuff. As a result they have to sell their fish to the money lenders who demand interest ranging up to 200 per cent

— Courtesy: News Network



(Right): Jewel Rana, a two feet and five inches tall man from Magura district is seen with Bangladesh film star Amin Khan (Left). The 28-year-old-short man will leave for the United States of America on Friday. According to his family sources, he is going there to enlist his name in the Guinness Book of World Records as the shortest man in the world. The authorities of Wonderland Children's Park at Gulshan in Dhaka have sponsored the trip.

---Star photo by Hossain Seraj

Obituary
BARGUNA, Nov 10: Alhaj Abdul Jabbar Mridha, a renowned businessman, died of cancer at his college road residence here on Sunday evening. He was 67, reports UNB. Jabbar Mridha, the owner of Jall Press, left behind his wife, sons, daughters and a host of well-wishers to mourn his death.



Natore district office of Bangladesh Water Development Board (WDB) has launched a massive riverine structural development scheme named Baral Dam Development Project involving Taka 17,57,40,000. The scheme has been aimed at protecting 1.10 lakh hectares of crop lands from the fury of flood and bringing drought prone crop lands under the irrigation network. WDB has constructed two power dam regulators with a capacity of 5,000 cusec each at Charghat and Atghoria, 16 km away, cum flashing sluice gates during the period of 1994-98. Photo shows the Atghoria regulator at the connecting point of the Baral and Nandabuzha. —Star photo

Larma visits Khagrachhari Cultural Instt

KHAGRACHHARI, Nov 10: Chairman of Hill Tracts Regional Council Jatindra Bodhipriya Larma alias Shantu Larma has visited the local Tribal Cultural Institute (TCI) here on Monday, reports BSS.

He emphasised the need and importance of tribal culture while exchanging views with the local government officials and educationists.

Larma said, Tribal Culture is not out of the national culture and heritage. He assured that a full-fledged Tribal Institute would be set up here soon.

Among others, Research Officer of TCI Susamoy Chakma and journalist Ziten Barja were present on the occasion.

40 arrested

From Our Correspondent FENI, Nov 10: Police arrested 40 people on charges of different criminal activities from Sadar thana last week.

Police said most of the arrested persons were wanted criminals.

Frustrated farmers taking jute back home from markets

SIRAJGANJ, Nov 10: Reason behind the unwillingness of farmers to grow jute is the low price of the "golden fibre" and things may worse further if the government fails to come up with rescue measures, reports UNB.

Many frustrated farmers were seen taking jute back home from markets due to its unexpected low price.

Farmers here who cultivated jute this year taking loan from money lenders at high interest rate, could not recover their production cost due to poor output of jute and its low price.

They said the government has authorised various jute mills, including Adamjee, to directly purchase jute from rural farmers through their purchasing centres so that the farmers get the due prices of their produce.

But the mill authorities were learnt to have been buying jute from middlemen instead of the growers, violating the government directives.

As a result, the farmers are being compelled to sell their produces to the middlemen at

nominal prices.

The middlemen are reportedly purchasing 'Desal' variety of jute at Tk 250 to Tk 270 per maund while 'Tosa' variety at Tk 300 to Tk 310, which is lower than the government rate.

When asked some officials at the jute purchasing centres said that they were buying jute from the middlemen as many overdue bills of the farmers could not yet be paid.

Girl raped in Netrakona

From Our Correspondent NETRAKONA, Nov 10: An eight-year-old girl was raped in Satpa Kolonipara area in the town recently.

According to police, one Hablu, 28, took the girl forcibly to a nearby place at night and raped her.

The girl was returning home from her neighbour's house at night. Local people caught Hablu and handed over him to police.



Mymensingh Aquaculture Extension Project has been conducting a fruitful programme in Mymensingh region, Tangail and Gazipur districts to achieve self-reliance in fish production and development of socio-economic condition of the landless people. Photo shows a scene of fishing at a pond of the project. —Star photo

Gopalganj DIARY

Udichi founding day observed

From Our Correspondent GOPALGANJ, Nov 9: The 31st founding anniversary of the local unit of Udichi was observed here recently in a befitting manner.

A two-day programme was arranged at the Gopalganj Shilpakala Academy premises on the occasion. The programmes included rally, discussion meeting, drama and cultural function.

A colour full rally was brought out in Gopalganj town and which paraded the main road of the town. A discussion meeting was also held at the local Shilpakala Academy premises. Foet Rabindra Nath Adhikari, president of the local unit of Udichi presided over the discussion meeting. Mohammad Ali Khan Abu Mia, chairman of Gopalganj Pourasabha and Abu Hossain, principal of Gopalganj Anirban School (kindergarten) were present as chief and special guests.

Boy burnt alive

One boy was killed and three others injured and valuable goods worth about Taka Five lakh gutted recently in a devastating fire at Pukuria village in Gopalganj sadar thana.

The fire originated from a open lamp at the house of Ismat Ali Sheikh of village Pukuria in Gopalganj sadar thana and the fire gutted all the six houses nearby.

Goods including rice, paddy, clothes, furniture and other valuables worth about Taka Five lakh and the 12-year-old son of Ismat Ali Sheikh named Shoban Sheikh died on the spot. Three other children were seriously injured and admitted to Gopalganj Sadar Hospital in a critical condition. The admitted persons are Mithul Sheikh, 11, Mohin Sheikh, 9, and Kohinor Begum, 10.

An Unnatural Death (UD) case was registered with Gopalganj Police Station in this connection.

Dacoity at Pubali Bank

A dacoity was committed recently at Pubali Bank Limited, Gopalganj branch.

A group of armed dacoits entered into the bank by breaking open the grill of the door and window and fastened the night-gaurd by rope on the fateful night. They looted two watches and the telephone sets, but they could not enter into the cash room. Anwar Rahman, Officer-in-Charge of Gopalganj PS reached the bank with police contingent immediately, but the dacoits managed to escape with the booty. Police arrested the night guard named Kazi Shahidul Islam for investigation.

A case was registered with Gopalganj PS in this connection.

College student commits suicide

A college student named Karik Chandra, 19, son of Mukul Chandra of village Kushi in Tangipara thana committed suicide by taking poison on November 1 morning.

The victim had a quarrel with his parents over a television set on October 31 night. He became very upset following the quarrel and committed suicide by taking poison on November 1 morning.

An Unnatural Death (UD) case has been registered with Tangipara PS in this connection. Police recovered the dead body and sent it to Gopalganj Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Medicines Sans Frontieres' clinics in Khagrachhari

KHAGRACHHARI, Nov 10: Medicines Sans Frontieres (MSF), this year's Nobel Prize winner, is going to set up two community health clinics in the hill district for the poor, reports UNB.

The clinics will be set up in Dighinala and Panchhari thanas to provide healthcare facilities to both the tribal and non-tribal people.

They will also carry out a campaign to make the people aware about health issues.

Country Manager of the Holland-based organisation Moniek Hooijmans made the disclosure at a press briefing here on Monday.

She told newsmen that people of the district were suffering from various diseases like malaria, diarrhoea, measles and other diseases. "And to reach them the basic health services, health workers and traditional midwives would be imparted training."

Hooijmans said MSF was strictly maintaining its 'impartial role' in providing health care and humanitarian support to the victims of natural disasters and communal, religious and political conflicts.

"MSF stood beside Bangladesh people during natural disasters in 1992 and 1995 to 1997. It also provided healthcare services to the Rohingyas who took refuge in Bangladesh," she said.

MSF district project coordinator, Mariet Lohman and local officials were present at the press briefing.



A family planning worker feeding polio vaccine to a child recently on the occasion of 6th NID at a health camp at village Kabirpur in Saikupa thana in Jhenidah district. —Star photo



Zothi Smith, Coordinator of the British Council, Chittagong centre called on Chittagong University Pro-Vice Chancellor Prof Abu Yousuf Alam recently at his office in Chittagong. —Star photo



A colourful rally was brought out in Rajshahi city recently in observance of World Postal Day. —Star photo