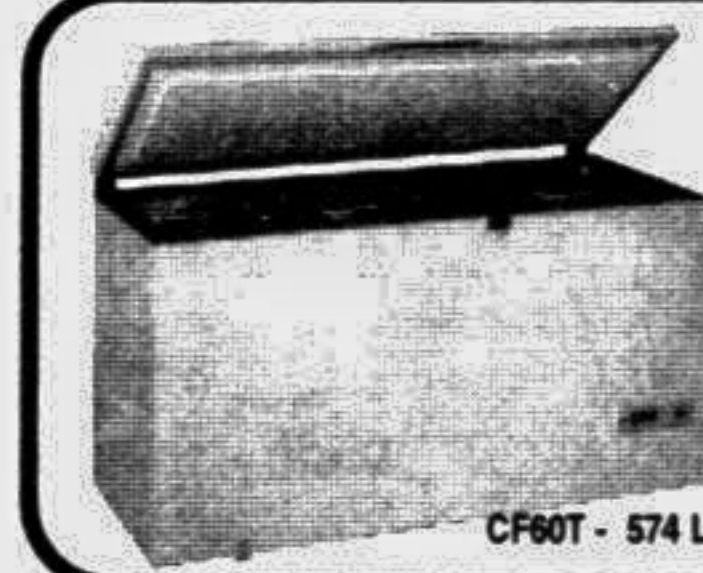


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Down to Earth

Vestiges of old Facilities on Buriganga River

By A S M Nurunnabi

The Buriganga river at present is in terrible straits on account of various factors. Yet on this wretched stretch of the polluted river, vestiges of some old practices still continue for those who, of necessity, have to use them.

Take for instance, the floating hotels on water front of the river, located near Wishehat. Such floating hotels, which form a characteristic feature of the city life, are now much reduced in number, standing among a medley of water vessels of various sizes — uncovered and covered boats, cargo boats, speed boats, tugs, motor launches, tankers, etc. In the foreground, however, the conspicuous existence of some house-boats cannot be missed. These serve as popular floating restaurants-cum-residential hotels catering meals from early morning till midnight.

These houseboats serving as eating houses are unadorned, lacklustre and mostly worn out with their existence dating back almost half a century. According to a source well acquainted with situations at such hotels, the Muslim hotels get more customers than any other time of the year, particularly prior to the important festivals of Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Azha.

A substantial number of customers here are transit passengers staying for a day or two or even for shorter duration before they undertake onward journeys. There are also boarders who stay for some days in connection with their cases before civil courts. Besides such common visitors, people come in large numbers at the lone Hindu hotel here at the time of Langal-bandi Mela on the Sitalakhiya river near Narayanganj.

A knowledgeable old timer of the city said these eating houses had emerged after the partition of the sub-continent in 1947. The income which keeps them in trade comes from the sale of cooked foods — mainly rice, vegetables, pulses and fish curries. Diners mostly belonging to the modest income bracket — hawkers, small retail-

ers, manual labourers and so on — are regular customers here. Items of eatables served at these establishments are comparatively cheap because of lower standard of ingredients used for preparation of the food items.

A typical houseboat used as a hotel has a dining room where about 12 persons can have their meals at a time. Normally 40 feet long and 12 feet in breadth, it has double decks. There are other smaller floating hotels, moored in the vicinity of the river bank, immediate surroundings of which are far from happy. Dirt, filth and garbage of every description defile their location. Getting to one of them or disembarking from them is precarious owing to unstable wooden planks used by customers at those boats. Owners of these hotels face various problems, the chief among them is periodic visitation by mastans who seek to enjoy themselves for sometime on board with their questionable companions.

There are other major river terminals such as those at Goalundo, Narayanganj, Chandpur, Nagarbari, Barisal and Bahadurabad. But nowhere any floating restaurants and hotels can be seen, except at Wishehat in Dhaka. Because of construction of the long wall along the bank known as the Buckland Bund, most of the floating hotels anchored there are not visible from the road. The existing floating hotels are now a minority — remnant of the once brisk hotel business for customers of small means in the early part of the fifties.

They have now almost ceased to be objects of curiosity and novelty among the city dwellers. In the opinion of observers, if we are true to our tradition and heritage, these ignored and neglected ramshackle floating hotels could be made attractive by imaginative entrepreneurs if they carry out some innovations on modern lines. With better cuisine and other necessary facilities, some such boats could be developed into fine mo-

torised vessels that could carry excursion seekers, thereby becoming an interesting feature of tourism both for the domestic and foreign tourists.

Another element of vestige of old facilities lies in the occupation of the boatmen ferrying passengers from one side of the river to the other. Through the construction of the China Friendship Bridge and another bridge over the river nearing completion, the scope of their occupation may be somewhat limited. In the two km-length of the river, extending from Borisur ghat under Keraniganj to Sadarghat, there are, it is learnt, about 20 ghats from which about 500 ferry boats operate. The boatmen who have been engaged in the occupation for a long time are now said to be faced with serious financial impediments.

As per normal practice, these ghats are leased out to the highest bidders who are called *ghatdars*. For operating their boats from these ghats, the boatmen are required to pay fees at certain rates to the *ghatdars*.

Sometime back, there were reports that the *ghatdars* increased their rates of fees, as a result of which the income of the boatmen was reported to have been adversely affected. In some cases, it has been widely alleged that the boatmen on the river Buriganga had become hostages to the *ghatdars* whose hired mastans made exactions to the extent of fifty per cent of the hard-earned income of the boatmen.

Some of the boatmen are reported to be residents in slums at Kamrangir char, Kamalbagh and Keraniganj areas. With the small income they make after meeting the demands of *ghatdars* and their mastans, they are said to be eking out a miserable existence. The boatmen are said to pass their life without any protest or co-ordinated action for relief from any quarter against the oppression of the *ghatdars* and their mastans.



Scheduled examinations of various schools in the city which could not be held on November 9, owing to opposition organised Hartal (general strike) were conducted on Friday under special arrangements. Photo shows examinations in progress at the Vignarunessa Noon School. — Star Photo

Many schools to remain open today

By Staff Correspondent

A good number of business houses, banks, educational institutions, garments factories, markets and NGO offices remained open in the city on the weekly holiday yesterday.

There were dawn to dusk countrywide hartals on November 7-9 last week at the call of opposition parties.

Sources said, educational institutions and offices of different organisations will also remain open today, also a holiday.

A number of Sonali Bank branches in the capital remained open yesterday. At some schools, students sat for their annual examinations. Customs offices in the city also operated. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina earlier said that banks and customs offices would operate, on weekly holidays, if needed.

Reopening of JU: Meeting today

By JU Correspondent

Jahangirnagar University authorities have called a meeting of provosts, proctor and assistant proctors today to discuss the issue of reopening of the university, now closed sine die.

When contacted over telephone yesterday, Acting Vice Chancellor Prof Abdul Bayes said, "If possible, I will also hold a meeting with the deans of faculties tomorrow".

The acting VC said the university would be reopened as early as possible. He might call an emergency meeting of the Syndicate soon to finalise the date of reopening, he added.

Two die drinking liquor in Barguna

BARGUNA, Nov 12: A liquor tragedy at Betagi thana headquarters of the district claimed lives of two people today and sent another 10 to hospital, reports UNB.

The dead were identified as Narayan Chandra, 60, and his nephew Babul, 27.

Sources said 12 people out of a group of 20-25 who drank rectified spirit at a temple on Wednesday night were admitted to private hospitals on Thursday after they fell sick.

Narayan and Babul died in the hospital today while condition of Kishore, 25, was stated to be critical. All the sick were taking treatment in private hospitals to avoid arrest.

BNP condemns filing of 'false cases' against 400 partymen

BNP yesterday condemned filing of 'false cases' against 400 partymen, including Abdullah Al Noman, Sadek Hossain Khoka, Joydul Abedin Faruq and Nabillah Nabi, following incident during hartal, reports UNB.

In a statement, BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan said the government had filed the cases against BNP leaders who narrowly escaped death during the three-day hartal and were seriously injured.

"It's nothing but a conspiracy of the government to send them to jail failing to send them to the graveyard," he said, adding that everything is possible for this government.

The BNP leader demanded immediate trial of those who had tried to kill the BNP leaders and withdrawal of all false cases against BNP leaders and activists.

In another statement, he condemned the filing of 'false cases' against leaders and activists of BNP and its front organisations of Uzirpur thana in Barisal and of Naogaon, and Tarakanda of Mymensingh.

Tk 25cr outstanding bill

Gas supply to NGFF may be snapped

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, Nov 12: Suppliers will disconnect the gas to a fertiliser factory in Fenchuganj if it does not pay its bills shortly, officials warned the company last week.

Jalalabad Gas Transmission and Distribution System Ltd. said the Natural Gas Fertiliser Factory owes Tk 25 crore in outstanding bills.

However, factory officials pleaded for more time. They said the factory exceeded its 85,000 tonne production target but a drastic fall in fertiliser sales combined with high storage, transport and expansion costs cut into profits.

Ahad murder: Main accused remanded

By Staff Correspondent

'Kangali' Zakir, the main accused in sergeant Ahad Pervaz murder case, was taken on a two-day remand by the Motijheel police yesterday.

Zakir, along with two others — Faruk and Sanullah — was arrested from a garage at Agha Khan Road under Gulshan Police Station on Wednesday night, police said.

They were produced in the CMM's Court yesterday.

Ten people have so far been arrested in connection with Ahad murder case, police said.

Sergeant Ahad was killed by a gang of muggers while on duty at the Shipla Crossing in the city's Motijheel area on the night of October 28.

Angry people block traffic, detain policemen protesting robbery

COMILLA, Nov 12: Angry people blocked traffic on the Dhaka-Chandpur Highway and detained two plainclothes policemen along with a police car for nearly 10 hours protesting highway robbery, police said, reports BSS.

They said local people and transport workers stopped vehicles moving on the highway after midnight last night when a group of highway robbers put up a barricade in Kapshtala area of the Laksham thana in a bid to commit dacoity on buses and trucks.

At one stage, residents of the roadside village and transport workers chased the dacoits, but they managed to flee. The agitated people detained the plainclothesmen suspecting their links with the highway robbers as they came to the spot in a police car without any weapon.

The villagers withdrew the barricade and released the policemen following negotiations with senior officials of Comilla district police at about 12 noon today.

Extortion 7 policemen suspended in Magura

From Our Correspondent

MAGURA, Nov 12: Seven policemen, including a sub-inspector of Magura Sadar thana, were suspended today on charge of collecting tolls from a bus driver and passengers in Parnaduali area on Magura-Faridpur highway.

The suspended policemen are Sub-Inspector Proshanto Kumar Biswas, constables Tarebur Rahman, Rajab Ali, Asmat Ali, Abdul Aziz, Serajul Islam and Belal Hossain.

They were closed to the district police lines.

Almost 99 dealers, including sugar mills, the Tea Research Institute and the Rice Research Institute, bought fertiliser at the factory earlier this year.

However, almost a third have left, lured away by cheaper prices at the Zia Fertiliser Factory in Ashuganj.

The factory has over 100,000 tonnes of fertiliser worth Tk 50 crore currently stored at its plant and other sites around north and south Bengal under the buffer stock program.

"We have cut production because one of our two ammonia plants is under construction until the end of the month," said an official.

Farmers use over 50,000 tonnes of fertiliser in Sylhet annually, a fifth of that before the onset of the monsoon.

The agriculture ministry's November sales target is 3,400 tonnes, though factory officials said they don't expect business to pick up until December.

Young man slaughtered in city

By Staff Correspondent

An unidentified young man was slaughtered by miscreants in the city's Purana Paltan area under Motijheel police station yesterday morning.

The reason behind the killing of 30-year-old man, who was wearing lungi and shirt could not be known immediately.

Police said, informed by an anonymous phone caller, they went to 97 Purana Paltan and found the body lying on the ground.

Police recovered the body and sent it to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy.

A case was lodged with Motijheel thana in this connection, but none was arrested till filing of this report last night.

Power officials' ultimatum

By Staff Correspondent

The Power Generation Officers' Association has threatened to go for tough action programme from November 19 to protest against the government's plan to transform the Ashuganj Power Unit into a company and passage of the 'Electricity Reform Bill'.

The association, a body representing the officials working in different power generation units of the country, demanded that the government must cancel the plan by November 18 or face 'tougher action programme' from the following day.

According to a press release issued by the association yesterday, the Ashuganj unit is a profit-making one. It also feared that there would be job insecurity if the government enacted the reform bill, eventually abolishing the Power Development Board.

50,000 bags of potatoes looted from cold storage

From Our Correspondent

SIRAJGANJ, Nov 12: Hundreds of agitating people looted 50,000 bags of potatoes from Shahjadpur Shahmukhdum Cold Storage at about 7 am today.

Police and witnesses said hundreds of people, agitating for reasons unknown as yet, broke into the cold storage, owned by one 'Chika' Selim, and looted the potatoes.

The owner has not informed the police of the looting. Police, however, filed a GD and an investigation is on.

Durban summit opens

From page 1

must remain at the centre of our focus, as recent negative development in member state of Pakistan have shown, as recent very happy developments have demonstrated in the member state of Nigeria."

"Majority of us have been elected to the positions we hold by our people. It would not be a mistake if we were to describe ourselves as a convocation of the elected representatives of the poor of the world. The masses elected all of us because they were confident that we were the champions of the poor."

"Because of that, they took it that we are champions against poverty and the human degradation that accompanies all life whose principal impulse derives from the passionate rumble of any civilised stomach."

President Obasanjo of Nigeria received special mention from all five opening speakers — the other two being the Singapore and Jamaica prime ministers giving vote of thanks. The African nation, suspended in 1995 in the wake of a military coup, staged a comeback this year after the return of democracy.

Pakistan, denied a seat at the summit following an "automatic" suspension from all Commonwealth Councils because of the October 12 military take-over, was a notable absentee. It also received mention by Chief Anyaoku. Both said it was important to uphold the Harare Declaration that provided the organisation its fundamental political values."

But Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was at the centre of attention being the only woman in the midst of the 47 heads, apart from the Queen. Absence of President Chandrika Kumaratunga of Sri Lanka and New Zealand Prime Minister Jenny Shipley has made her the only head of government at a meeting that will talk among other issues advancement of the cause of women.

The number one on the agenda however are the "global political and economic developments" at the November 12-15 event which will also be considering giving eight-member Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (C-MAG) powers to investigate "poor democratic practices".

The C-MAG has prepared a report for the CHOGM, in which it deals with Pakistan and three other countries with dubious records. The core Commonwealth values are enshrined in the Harare Declaration, adopted eight years ago. The C-MAG, formed four years later at Auckland, has the mandate to see if the Harare principles are being respected.

"In the promotion of the fundamental political values of the Commonwealth, Harare has made all the difference. Before Harare, the Commonwealth had been in the awkward position of professing democracy and democratic principles but too often compelled to live with regimes which were demonstrably undemocratic," Chief Anyaoku said.

"Thanks to Harare, the Commonwealth has finally resolved that contradiction and we are today in the happy situation where the Commonwealth meets at the summit without any representative of military regime," he said in an obvious reference to Pakistan's suspension forced by the Declaration.

"In a very real sense, the Commonwealth is now a club of democracies."

Interestingly, it is Zimbabwe which is facing charges of failing to meet the tough new standards of democracy and human rights. A London-based independent think-tank, The Foreign Policy Centre, has suggested in a report being launched today that Zimbabwe, Zambia, Kenya and Sri Lanka be tossed out of the Commonwealth for such failures.

However, Chief Anyaoku, speaking at a pre-summit press briefing yesterday, said the report was not on the table for consideration of the Heads.

In the opening speech, the secretary-general repeated his call for easing the debt burden of the poor countries, warned against the negative effects of globalisation on the small states and listed developments in the decade of his being as the leader at the Marlborough House in London.

"Serious challenges to development remain. The most urgent of these challenges is the eradication of poverty."

"Today some 1.5 billion people subsist on one dollar or less a day. Globalisation may have brought about a phenomenal expansion in world trade, finance and investment, but for countless millions the stark reality is one of deepening poverty."

"If globalisation is to become people-centred, then we must begin by harnessing its very considerable achievements and potential to the eradication of poverty."

The theme for this year's CHOGM is -- *People-Centred Development: The Challenge of Globalisation*.

In the last 10 years, as mentioned in his report *From Kuala Lumpur to Durban* and in his speech today, the Commonwealth has extended its activity to hardcore economic areas.

Chief Anyaoku, elected in Kuala Lumpur summit in 1989, ends his second five-year term in March next year.

"As a result of the Commonwealth initiatives, the debt burden of the highly indebted poor countries is being addressed under the HIPC initiative now being operated by the World Bank and the IMF."

"The four regional investment funds set up under the aegis of the Commonwealth Private Investment Initiative (CPII) to help mobilise funds for developing regions are now all operational," said Chief Anyaoku.

"There is also the Trade and Investment Access Facility to assist small and specially disadvantaged member states in adjusting to the demands of globalisation."

The Commonwealth Business Forum that met in Johannesburg November 9-10 brought together government and business leaders to "promote a positive climate for Commonwealth trade and investment". Chief Anyaoku who attended it along with several heads of government called the Forum "highly successful".

He also mentioned the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation which helps "build local capacity through technical assistance and advice."

After the morning opening ceremony, the leaders of 52 national delegations -- 47 of them heads of government -- sat in an executive session to discuss reports by the Secretariat and the Commonwealth Business Council.

A second executive session in the afternoon was to deal with the election of a new secretary-general, among other issues. Farooq Sobhan of Bangladesh and Don McKinnon of New Zealand are in the race for the job.

The Bangladesh prime minister is likely to take more interest in economic issues. "We are more concerned about trade and investment issues... WTO and globalisation etc..." a Dhaka delegate to CHOGM said and then hastily added: "Political issues are important too."

The heads will also consider reports from the Commonwealth Ministerial Group on Small States. A joint Commonwealth-World Bank study suggests special treatment for states with population below 1.5 million. The authors of the study told journalists yesterday that the problems of these countries were unique to themselves, who were at risk being perished by a major environmental disaster.

The interim report, titled *Small States: Challenges in the Global Economy*, also discusses "the risk of marginalisation of small states in the process of globalisation".

Processions

From page 1

In Dhaka, heads of the four parties will lead their respective party processions.

BNP, which will organise its public meeting prior to its mass procession at 3pm, has instructed all its units in the city to take all-out preparation for making the programme a "success".

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia will lead the march, which will parade different city streets.

JP Chairman HM Ershad will lead his party procession from Muktangan on Sunday afternoon. Prior to the march, the JP will hold a public meeting there.

Jamaat leaders and workers, after a public rally at the North gate of Baitul Mukarram at 3pm, will bring out a procession. Jamaat Ameer Golam Azam will lead the procession.

The IOJ will bring out its procession from Purana Paltan crossing at 3pm.

Ershad Shikdar

From page 1

incumbent top police officials made any comment on the probe committee report. One of them became irritated when asked about his reaction.

The Additional Police Commissioner (on deputation) Nooruddin was on leave for nearly three months. He went on leave few days before Ershad was arrested and resumed his duty few days back. His long absence during the hunt for Ershad and his accomplices and the month long interrogation by two committees has put him under question mark, sources said.

Daily Star

From page 1

tyrs. Editor of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam called upon the students to utilise their brilliance in building the nation so that 'we can reach the 21st century with dignity'.

From among the outstanding students, who achieved 10 and 11 'A's in O level examinations, Fareed Bhuiyan, Simna, Abbas and Asif Zahir spoke on the occasion.

The joyous occasion was attended by about 700 students, parents and teachers, held at the Chartered Accountants auditorium in the city. Prizes for the winners were sponsored by Transcom Ltd.

Frequent hartals

DU fears fresh session jams

By Staff Correspondent

The recent spate of frequent hartals (general strikes) may see three months elapsed from the academic session at Dhaka University, the DU authorities feared.

The ongoing final year examinations of all the departments will have to be rescheduled due to the repeated shut-down. Rescheduling of any examinations has a rollover effect on the academic sessions leading to session jams.

Some 4,000 examinees of both undergraduate and postgraduate courses from different departments could not sit for their examinations due to hartals on November 1, 7, 8 and 9, the university officials said.

They said due to the "unexpected closures" of the university, the authorities are going to face serious problems in holding the postponed examinations on fresh schedules.

Staggered examinations have a snowballing effect on the whole system — publication of results gets delayed and accommodation problem in the dormitories becomes acute.

Khulna BNP sues 27 BCL, Jubo League men

From Staff Correspondent

KHULNA, Nov 12: Nazrul Islam Manzu, general secretary of city BNP, filed a case today against 27 people of the ruling party's youth and student front accusing them of launching an armed attack on the day of hartal on November 9 near Khulna thana.

Earlier on November 10, Chhatra League's city convenor Abul Kalam Azad filed a case accusing 21 BNP men of launching an armed attack on a peaceful procession the same day.

Three FIR-named accused in the case filed by Chhatra League were arrested, but none of the accused in the case filed by BNP has so far been arrested.

Editor: Mahfuz Anam

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Petrobanga clarifies

By Staff Correspondent

Petrobanga in a clarification to The Daily Star news item on "Growing disinterest in exploration work: Oil cos relinquish half of blocks 13, 14 and 16" published on November 5, said that the PSC contractors relinquished the areas as part of a normal practice of the PSC.

The allocated area is to be relinquished in stages on fulfilment of the work obligations under the PSC. The relinquished area, in turn, may be opened for fresh oil and gas exploration under separate PSC," said the clarification Thursday.

"This ensures proper attention by the contractor for implementing the PSC obligation and safeguards the interest of the host country against wilful negligence in carrying out the exploration work by the contractor," added.

The clarification further noted that Petrobanga was currently purchasing gas from Cairn and Occidental for Sangu and Jalalabad gasfields respectively as per the provision of a separate Gas Purchase & Sales Agreement (GPSA) and there was no dispute with any of the companies on the gas purchase issue.

Landslide kills 2 at Sylhet

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, Nov 12: Two persons were killed and 10 others injured in a landslide at Ganaktila in Pathanpara area of the town this afternoon.

The dead were identified as Alpana, 18, daughter of Anwar Ali under Itna thana of Kishoreganj district and Lal Miah, 50, son of Yousuf Ali of Hashempur, Kishoreganj.

The incident occurred when some 20 labourers were levelling a small hill in the area. Suddenly, a big chunk of earth fell on them, resulting in death of two on the spot and injury of 10 others, witnesses said.

People from nearby areas and fire service personnel rushed to the spot and recovered the bodies. The bodies were sent to MAG Osmani Hospital for autopsy.