

Hides being smuggled to India

From Our Correspondent

RAJSHAHI, Mar 24: A mass of hides of animals sacrificed on the occasion of the Eid-ul-Azha are being smuggled to neighbouring India as local businessmen failed to collect those for lack of fund.

Local hide traders said due to non-availability of bank loan and non-payment of huge outstanding money with tannery owners in Dhaka, they are not in a position to purchase hides of sacrificial cows and goats.

Taking the advantage smugglers are collecting hides from rural and urban markets through their agents. Earlier, they distributed a huge amount of money among the agents. The larger portion of the money came from the hide traders in India, some local traders alleged.

They also said alleged that many Indian hide traders intruded into Bangladesh territory soon after the Eid and took away a huge quantity of hides of

sacrificed animals at throw-away prices.

According to markets sources, a cowhide and a goatskin were being sold at Taka 400 to Taka 800 and Taka 60 to Taka 120 respectively four days ago.

Local traders said they sold hides to tannery owners in Dhaka mostly on credit in the past years. The tannery owners owe a huge amount of money to local hide traders, said Abdus Salam Sarker, a hide trader who runs a warehouse at Baneshwar Bazar in Rajshahi.

We even cannot recover the money, he said adding that their business had suffered a major setback for that reason. Many of us have been compelled to give up the business for that reason, he said.

The smugglers and their agents buy hides on cash payment at the same rate given by the tannery owners in Dhaka. So many middlemen and

traders this year are selling their hides to the smugglers and their agents to avoid further sufferings, he said.

A whole sale trader of Natore district said he had been paid only Taka 26,000 out of the total outstanding money of Taka 4 lakh. The owner of a tannery telephoned me last week to supply hides to the tannery on condition of 50 per cent payment but I rejected the proposal, said the trader seeking anonymity. I shall not buy hides this season, he said.

When contacted, some agents, who were not seen in the past in hide-trade, but are now very much active, said on condition of anonymity that the money was coming from India. Indian traders have opened warehouses in the border areas and are running the business from there through their agents, they added.



A boy sprays on buds of a mango tree at village Binander Para under Sadar thana of Jamalpur district. Farmers expect good harvest in the district this season. — Star photo

Mushroom growth of brickfields in Gopalganj

GOPALGANJ, Mar 24: The strength of this country lies in its natural resources, but widespread logging of trees for brickfields has caused extensive damage to its nature.

Gone are the days when villages were dotted with trees and lush green fields. Flavour of date molasses would sweeten the hearts of villagers in the winter. Now all these are rapidly becoming the sweet memories of nature-loving people.

Defying the government ban, some brickfield owners are extensively using timbers in their brickfields as firewood leaving a far-reaching impact on the environment.

Rather than economic benefits for the brickfield owners, the growing trend of logging trees for brickfields has threatened the country's environment, said an environmentalist.

He said most brickfields have sprung up on croplands close to human settlements, threatening the public health.

The country has a law, 'brick Burning Control Amendment Ordinance 1992' to regulate the activities of brickfield owners, but who cares.

The law makes it obligatory for the brickfield owners to use coal for backing bricks and prohibits setting up of brickfields on croplands and emis-

sion of baneful smoke from funnels. But these are hardly maintained.

It says brickfield owners will be fined Tk 50,000 or jailed for six months or both if timbers, except bamboo roots, are used in brickfields as firewood.

A brickfield owner, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said, 'We use timber because it's cost effective and available.'

'We will have to import 10 lakh metric tons of coal, if we all want to use it in our brickfields. And you know the hazards of import in our country,' he said in support of his contention.

Generally, brickfield owners procure firewood from villages with the help of their agents, who also occasionally bring timbers from the Sundarbans.

Some villagers here said they are forced to sell their trees during the Bangla months of Ashwin and Kartik when food crisis hits them hard.

According to statistics from Environment Department, some 43,000 kg of firewood is required to bake one lakh bricks.

More reports said the brickfield owners here never abide by the rule of setting up brickfields on unfertile and uncultivable land. They even collect earth

from plain land for making bricks.

The Ministry of Land in a circulation has said the use of fertile and cropland for setting up of brickfield is strictly prohibited. Its campaign also went unheeded.

A senior official at the Environment Ministry in Dhaka said unbridled use of firewood in brickfields causes emission of various noxious gases like carbon monoxide, flonin and sulphur dioxide, affecting the public health.

Living plants also suffer the same fate as the human being does. People may suffer from various skin and respiratory

diseases due to emission of the harmful gases.

The brickfields also send out ashes making a layer on nearby plants and soils, affecting the plant's growth and land fertility.

About the mushrooming growth of brickfields, the official of the Environment Ministry said brickfield owners take license from the local Deputy Commissioner sidestepping their ministry taking advantage of a loophole in the existing law.

There should be some provisions to take clearance from the Environment Department, he said. — UNB Feature.

Fall in water levels hampers river traffic

From Our Correspondent

JAMALPUR, Mar 24: Rapid fall of water levels in various rivers and emergence of shoals have posed threat to river traffic in the region.

According to Water Development Board sources, water levels in the river Brahmaputra at Dewanganj and Ghani near Jamalpur were marking fall. The sources added water levels in Jamuna at different points were also falling.

At present the river vehicles including ferries and country boats plying between Jaganathaganj Ghat-Sirajganj Ghat, Bahadurabad Ghat-Sanandabarighat, Bahadurabad-Chilmarihat and Madarganj-Sharia Kandi Ghat are facing a lot of difficulties.

BIWTA has taken a plan for dredging the rivers, according to WDB sources.

Believe it or not!

From Our Correspondent

MOULVIBAZAR, Mar 24: The words 'Allah' and 'Mohammad' were inscribed in Arabic on a piece of meat of a sacrificial animal here on the day of Eid-ul-Azha on March 17.

This happened in the house of Abdus Sahhid, a retired Ranger of Forest Department of 'Meer Manjil' at 10 Lake Road in this town. He purchased a sacrificial cow from local cattle market, the price of which was Taka 13,500. On the Eid day the cow was sacrificed accordingly. When the female members of the family were cooking the meat, their attention was drawn at a particular piece of meat which was coming up again and again. At one stage they picked it up from the pot

and found that the word 'Allah' was inscribed in Arabic on its one side and the word 'Mohammad' was inscribed on its other side.

They preserved it in a bottle with great honour. Hundreds of people including local journalists visited the house and saw for themselves the piece of meat.

The owner of the house, Abdus Sahhid showed the journalists a small copy of the holy Quran of length 3 centimetre and of 2 centimetre width. He also informed that he had collected it in Chittagong while he served there. He had been possessing it for the last 50 years.



A farmer and his son irrigate a Boro paddy field at a village in Jhenidah district last week. Farmers expect good output of the crop this season in the district. — Star photo



Popularity of Bio-fertiliser

Bio-fertiliser has become popular among Mymensingh farmers these days. Photo shows field view on the effect of Bio-fertiliser on leguminous crops. — Star photo by Aminul Islam

Primary school dropouts up in Rajshahi division

NATORE, Mar 24: Despite government's hectic effort to eradicate illiteracy from the country by the year 2000, over 26 lakh children in the Rajshahi division are still deprived of primary education, reports UNB.

A recent study of the Primary Education Directorate showed that a total of 45,95,330 children were enrolled in government and non-government primary schools till December 1999.

But nearly 9.65 lakh of them stopped going to schools since long, it said.

There are a total of 16,290 government and non-govern-

ment schools in the 16 northern districts apart from hundreds of primary schools run by various NGOs under Non-formal Education Programme.

According to another study conducted by an NGO in the Rajshahi division, there are 62,43,809 children of 6-10 years in the 16 northern districts, but some 26 lakh of them are still deprived of primary education.

The present government conducted a survey on children. However, there is no guideline for the school authorities on how to check the rate of dropouts.

To ensure primary education for the children in the schools,

the authorities earlier introduced ingredient-oriented education system, but it was withdrawn in 1995.

The children of the northern districts are being deprived of primary education for want of sufficient schools.

Some of the schools are in dilapidated condition following damages by floods and other natural calamities. These could not be repaired for lack of funds.

Describing physical facilities of the primary schools, the survey report said tubewells installed earlier near a few schools remained inoperative for long.

Battle for Belonia

A subject of study in military academies

FENI, Mar 24: Parallel lines are drawn between the battles of Al-Ameen in the Middle East theatre of the Second World War and Sialkot in the 1965 Indo-Pak War and those of Belonia fought during the Bangladesh Liberation War because of their strategic importance in military science.

Freedom fighters and Pakistan occupation army fought a number of fierce battles in 1971 to take control of the border town of Belonia. It is surrounded by India on the east, west and north while Feni is on the south. A land mass of 18 miles in length and 8 miles in breadth serves as a corridor connecting Chittagong Port with the rest of the country.

Description and analysis of the battles at Belonia given by military experts are a subject of study for the gentlemen cadets at the military academies in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan considering their strategic importance and war tactics adopted by the warring sides.

Twenty-one top ranking army officers in the rank of brigadiers, from different parts of the world visited Belonia battlefield after 1971. A large number of soldiers of Pakistani occupation army were killed or

wounded at this front in the hands of valiant freedom fighters. World media splashed pictorial reports on the fierce fighting of freedom fighters in the Belonia sector.

At the beginning of the war, undaunted freedom fighters kept the place free of occupation forces for three months.

Alarmed by repeated defeat of the Pakistani forces in the hands of freedom fighters on the Belonia front, the Chief of Pakistan armed forces flew in here.

Three captains and one lieutenant of Bangladesh regular force under the supervision of 'K' force Chief Major Khaled Mosharraf led the freedom fighters in the Belonia battles, while two brigadiers under the direct control of General Hamid led the Pakistani side.

Belonia battle were fought in two phases, the first started on June 6, 1971. At the start, the freedom fighters retreated to nearby Indian territory while fighting with the occupation force. Later they recaptured the area under the leadership of Capt. Gaffar, who was later retired as colonel and became minister for civil aviation and tourism, and Capt Jafar Imam, who was later retired as Lt. Col

and became minister for jute, and kept the area under control till June 27 when it fell to the Pakistani force. The freedom fighters again retreated to nearby Indian territory.

The final armed encounter between freedom fighters and Pakistani army took place on June 20 in the Belonia front. Two columns of Pakistan army, led by two brigadiers, were sent to Munsirhat where they faced strong resistance from freedom fighters, led by Capt. Gaffar and Capt. Jafar Imam, on June 18, 1971. Specially trained commandos were flown by helicopter from Dhaka to Munsirhat at the directive of Pakistani General Hamid in support of the Pakistani columns when they could not proceed ahead breaking the freedom fighters defense after applying all available force they had.

Fortification of Pakistan army columns by specially trained commandos from Dhaka forced the freedom fighters to retreat to nearby Fulgazi area. When the Pakistani army was strengthened with reinforcements, the freedom fighters destroyed the Fulgazi Bridge on Mohuri river and retreated further to Chittozia. Despite several attempts the

Pakistani army could not cross the Mohuri River and later resorted to cannon attack on freedom fighters.

On June 20, 1971, the Pakistani occupation force jumped on the freedom fighters by crossing the Cilonia River by helicopters. A fierce battle took place in which both the sides suffered huge casualties. Failing to withstand the onslaught, the freedom fighters retreated to Parshuram after implanting land mines. Rejoiced with the retreat, the Pakistani army followed the retreating freedom fighters when two of their companies were killed by land mine, which forced them to halt their advance.

Parshuram was under the control of the freedom fighters till June 26, 1971. The occupation army launched severe air attack on Parshuram in afternoon of June 26 while land force columns of the enemy also launched attack in the area. Finding the situation critical, the 'K' force headquarters directed Capt. Gaffar and Capt. Jafar Imam to take shelter to nearby Indian territory.

The second phase of Belonia battle started on November 6, 1971. Capt. Jafar Imam was in charge of freedom fighters at

the front. Capt Imam took position with his troops near Fulgazi on November 6 as per war plan drawn by 'K' force Chief Khaled Mosharraf. He asked freedom fighters to build bunkers along the railway track to interrupt free movement of Pakistani Army by train. The occupation force launched several offensives to break the bunker defense of the freedom fighters, but failed. One train running from Feni to Parshuram with a full load of Pakistani army came under attack and was destroyed by freedom fighters, leaving hundreds of army jawans dead or wounded.

To take revenge of their humiliation, the occupation force launched a desperate simultaneous air and land attacks on freedom fighters at Fulgazi on November 9. The Liberation Army resisted the attack, destroying one of the attacking war planes.

The freedom fighters then launched attack on Pakistan position at Munsirhat forcing them to retreat to Bandhua on November 12. The freedom fighters advanced further and took position at Anandapur. The enemy, however, built up their front defense line near

Feni and Pathangarh fortified with long range cannon and started shelling on freedom fighters at Anandapur. A good number of freedom fighters embraced martyrdom or wounded in the Pakistani cannon shelling. Finding the situation unbearable, the Liberation Army abandoned their hold and took position nearer to the enemy line at Hasanpur.

Meanwhile, long range cannons of the Joint Command started giving artillery coverage to freedom fighters from Munsirhat. After several successful operations, area between Belonia to Bandhua came under the control of the freedom fighters. Then the two sides kept facing each other from their positions with artillery exchanges till December 9, 1971.

In the face of successful onslaught by freedom fighters and social resistance from local people, the Pakistani occupation force retreated to Chittagong leaving Feni to the hold of the Liberation Army.

Capt Jafar Imam first hoisted the Bangladesh flag on Feni Circuit House building on December 10, 1971 when Feni was finally liberated from the clutches of the occupation forces. — BSS Feature.

News snaps

Train services demanded

HABIGANJ, Mar 24: Local people demanding resumption of train services on Habiganj-Shayestaganj route blocked Dhaka-Sylhet route at Shayestaganj junction recently, reports UNB.

Committee for Restoration of Train Services on Habiganj-Shayestaganj route has announced the programme. Train services on the Habiganj-Shayestaganj route, set up during 1930-31, remained stopped since October 20, 1996.

Annual report presented

SAVAR, Mar 24: The annual general meeting of Jahangirnagar University Journalists' Association was held in the campus recently, reports UNB.

Chaired by association president Kazi Zakir Hossain, the meeting was attended by JU correspondents working for various national dailies and news agencies. Association General Secretary Rashed Mehedi presented the annual report at the meeting. It was followed by a dinner, which was attended, among others, by the Vice Chancellor, Treasurer, Registrar and provosts of different halls.

Clash over occupation of shoal

MANIKGANJ, Mar 24: A clash between two groups of villagers over occupation of a shoal in Shivalaya thana left 35 people injured recently, reports UNB.

Witnesses said the clash ensued as the supporters of Chand Mia Bahaduri and Jamal Sheikh went to invade the Alokdia shoal at about 8 am. Both the rival groups used various sharp weapons in the clash in which Karim, Abu Shama, China Khatun and Chan Mia, Fazlul Huq and Jamal Sheikh suffered critical wounds.

Academic bldgs being built

MEHERPUR, Mar 24: The Facilities Department of the Ministry of Education has been implementing the construction works of academic buildings of four non-government colleges at a cost of Taka 1.32 crore in the district, reports BSS.

The four colleges are Mujibnagar College, Meherpur Poura College, Gangni College and Gangni Mohila college. The construction works will be completed soon.

Agri fair concludes

MEHERPUR, Mar 24: A three-day agriculture fair organised by the local Agriculture Extension Department (AED) concluded in its office premises here recently, reports BSS.

A total of 35 different varieties of stalls were set up in the fair. On the concluding day, deputy director of AB M Elias Hossain, distributed the prizes among the producers, who secured first, second and third positions at the fair.

Youth with fake notes held

JESSORE, Mar 24: Police arrested a man with seven forged notes of Tk 50 denomination from Shamsul Huda Stadium area in the town recently, reports UNB.

He was identified as Abdullah Fakir, 30, of Habashpur village of Keshabpur thana who is now residing at Stadium para in the town. Police said they searched Abdullah after a shopkeeper informed them of the forged notes that was given while buying some cigarettes from his shop, and recovered six others forged note Tk 50 denomination from his possession. A case was filed with Kotwali police.

10 hurt as rivals clash

SHARIATPUR, Mar 24: Rival groups of terrorists clashed in Vojeswar, Naria, on Thursday leaving 10 persons injured, one with bullet, reports UNB.

Residents and police said the clash took place over domination in the area between the groups, one led by Noor Bayati and the other by Anwar Matbar. Kuddus Matbar, 22, who was injured by bullet was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital while Khorsheed Ali, 65, and Fazal 50, were admitted to Naria thana Health Complex. Others were being treated by local doctors.

Thakurgaon Bar Assoc polls

THAKURGAON, Mar 24: The election of the District Bar Association was held here in its office premises recently, reports BSS.

Advocate Waliur Rahman and Advocate Abdur Razzak were elected president and general secretary respectively. Besides Advocate Shafiullah Chowdhury was elected treasurer of the association.

Two women with hemp held

THAKURGAON, Mar 24: Police arrested two women along with 500 grams of 'ganja' (hemp) from Boda bazar of the district last week, reports UNB.

Saleha Begum, 40, and Parabi Begum, 55, both of Fakirpara in Thakurgaon town, were arrested on March 12 while returning to the town after collecting ganja from a frontier enclave. A case has been lodged in Boda thana.

Workshop

JAMALPUR, Mar 24: An advocacy workshop on 'Nutrition Programme Development' was held at Jamalpur Zilla Parishad auditorium recently, reports BSS.

Deputy Commissioner of Jamalpur Abul Bashar was the chief guest while selected religious leaders, teachers, pourasabha commissioners and journalists attended the workshop. District Information Officer AKM Azizul Huq presented the keynote on the subject. The discussants were Deputy Civil Surgeon Moksed Ali, Deputy Director of Family Planning, Nazibar Rahman Bhuiya, Prof. Jubair Islam, Hafez Moulana Nazrul Islam, Journalists Utpal Kanti Dhar, AAK Mahmudul Hasan, Pura Commissioner Md Helal and Shahnewaz Parvin.

Timber seized

RANGAMATI, Mar 24: Officials of Chittagong Hill Tracts South Forest Division (CHTSFD) recovered 4,500 cubic feet of illegally collected timber worth about Taka 20 lakh within seven days till Sunday, reports BSS.

The timbers were recovered after conducting raids at a number of sawmills in Rangamati town, Kaptai Lake and Jetty Ghat areas. According to a press release of CHTSFD, two persons were rounded up and two mechanised boats were seized during the raids.

Projects being implemented

TANGAIL, Mar 24: Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) is implementing four projects under special allotment in Annual Development Programme at a total cost of Taka 17,36,000 in the fiscal year, reports BSS.

Official sources said, the projects include construction of science laboratories for Gopalpur Alia Madrasa, Shakharia Asaduzzaman High School and Sati Shubid Suhrawardi High School and development of Naruchi Khandakar Asaduzzaman Stadium. The programme will be completed within two months.



Juveniles perform in a drama at Gaibandha town recently. — Star photo