

Indigenous Cultural Festival

RANGAMATI, Apr 7: The three-day Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Indigenous Cultural Festival, 2000 will begin at the local Tribal Cultural Institute premises on April 8 ahead of the tribals' traditional new year's festival, Baishabi, reports BSS.

The culture, heritage and life-style of the indigenous people of CHTs will be exhibited in the three-day festival, third of its kind in Rangamati, organised by local Jhoom Aesthetics Council, organisers said.

Seminars on education, culture and development of Chittagong Hill Tracts will be held on the occasion. Eminent literateurs, intellectuals and artists from Dhaka will participate in the festival.

Parshuram PS bldg may collapse

From Our Correspondent

FENI, Apr 7: Main building of Parshuram police station (PS) in the district may collapse anytime.

Local people said the building constructed during the British rule lacks maintenance and repair for many years. During the rainy season, water oozes from the ceiling and walls of the building, they added.

Mohammad Abdul Hanif, acting Officer-in-Charge of the police station, said during the rainy season it becomes difficult to save many documents from oozing water. The authorities should renovate the building, which was constructed in 1915, immediately to avert any 'tragedy', the police officer added.

The police station has other problems, he said. There is no toilet inside the *hazat*, or custody. Besides, there is no *hazat* for female detainees in police station, forcing police to make special arrangement for them. Moreover, the police station building lacks boundary walls.

Local people have urged the authorities concerned to take immediate steps to renovate the dilapidated building.

Plan to set up 30 community clinics in Khagrachhari

KHAGRACHHARI, Apr 7: The government has decided to set up community clinics to ensure health and sanitation facilities to the distressed, reports BSS.

About 50 community clinics will be set up in the district by 2003. Thirty of them will be set up in eight thanas in the current financial year at the first stage. The Ministry of Health will set up these community clinics.

According to Health Department sources, each clinic will provide regular treatment facilities and services relating to family planning and EPI.

The local people will give land for the clinic. Thana Family Planning Officers will motivate the people to give the land. In the meantime, some land for the clinics has been given by the people.

15 injured by terrorists

COX'S BAZAR, Apr 7: At least 15 people were injured, five with bullets, when armed terrorists attacked a village arbitration here on Thursday morning, reports UNB.

Witnesses said the attackers swooped on the villagers, gathered in the arbitration of a water pump theft case at Plemkhali union in Sadar thana. They started firing as soon as the names of thieves were disclosed by the witnesses.

Over 100 bombs and cocktails were exploded during the vandalism.

They also damaged a number of shops in the area and confined UP chairman Abdur Rahim and his family members for over an hour.

The injured were admitted to the local hospital. Hearing the news police rushed to the spot and arrested attackers Harun and Abu Hena from the spot.

Kidnapped boy found dead

GAZIPUR, Apr 7: An expatriate's son kidnapped to ransom from village Rasulpur in Kaliakoir thana was found dead in a ditch at a neighbouring village with his body burnt with acid, reports UNB.

Police said a group of terrorists led by Abdus Salam of village Bariabaha abducted Alhaj, 10, son of Ansar Ali who is living in Saudi Arabia, on the Eid day.

Later a series of village arbitration meetings were held on March 18 and 19 and Salam's elder brother, UP member Rahman, gave assurance of returning the boy.

But Salam, instead of returning the victim, asked his uncle for paying one lakh taka in ransom and took back the captive from behind the Globe Dairy Farm of the village at 10 pm on March 19. There was again village arbitration, with no results.



Fortune may favour mango traders in off-year (L) A mango garden in Chapai Nawabganj area where mango sprouts have grown abundantly. (R) A tree overburdened with green mangoes — Star photo

Farmers expect good mango output in off-year season

From Abdul Wadood

RAJSHAHI, Apr 7: The Bangla month of Chaitra is about to elapse. Buds are seen in mango trees. Even young fruits are also seen. Bees are now very much busy visiting mango-sprouts to collect honey and thereby helping pollination. It's mango time.

Mango traders have started visiting rural areas of Rajshahi, Chapainawabganj and Natore districts, the main mango producing areas in the country.

More than 60 per cent mango trees have blossomed this year, although it is an off-year for mango production.

Mohammad Sharifuddin, Agriculture Information Officer (AIO) of Rajshahi divisional office of Agriculture Information Department, said, 'Mango grows well in alternate years. Farmers experienced bumper harvest last year and this year is an off-year for mango production. But contrary to the tradition, a large number of trees have blossomed this year, much to the happiness of mango growers.'

Agriculture officials said growing awareness of the farm-

ers in taking care of trees before the start of the season has mainly contributed to huge blossoming in off-year. Besides, moderate rains in early days of *Magh* and *Falgun* months also helped trees blossom.

According to Rajshahi divisional office of Agriculture Extension Department (AED), there is no actual statistics regarding mango production and cultivation as hundreds of mango trees are cut and planted every year. There are about 25 lakh mango trees on 40,000 acres of land in four districts of greater Rajshahi district.

In Chapainawabganj district there are 13,75,000 mango trees on 22,000 acres of land. 5,00,000 mango trees on 8,000 acres of land in Rajshahi district, 3,75,000 mango trees on 6,000 acres of lands in Natore and 2,50,000 mango trees on 4,000 acres of land in Naogaon district.

These four districts produce almost 80 per cent of the total mango production in the country.

There are hundreds of varieties of mango. But *fazli*, *langra*, *gopalbhog*, *khirshapat*,

mohanbahog, *ashina*, *ranipachand*, *himsagar*, *madhusagar* and *lakshna* are popular with the farmers as these varieties are tasty and juicy.

Amrapali and *mahananda*, the two new varieties invented by Mango Research Institute at Chapainawabganj district headquarters have also become popular.

While visiting some areas in Sadar and Shibganj thanas of Chapainawabganj district last week, this correspondent found that most mango trees were in full blossom.

Mohammad Boududdin of Dorushia village in Shibganj thana has 102 mango trees. Almost all his trees grew mango last year and 58 trees have blossomed this year. 'This is a surprise to me that most trees have blossomed in this off-year too,' Boududdin said.

'Yes, I have taken much care before the start of the season,' he added. The farmer sprayed pesticides twice in the month of *Magh* and once in *Falgun*.

Motor Chandra Saha, an educated farmer of Shibganj Bazar said *bairals*, traders who obtain lease of mango-gardens

from owners for temporary period, are very much active this year.

Khondoker Afsaruddin, a *bairal* of Chapainawabganj, bought nine mango-gardens in Ranihat of Shibganj at a cost of Taka 1.5 lakh for a three-year period last year. He had a good harvest last year that earned him about Taka 80,000. I expect also a good harvest this off-year, he said.

A mango-garden is sold and bought one to five times a season, farmers said. Some farmers sell trees just after the trees blossom. Some sell the mango gardens after fruits appear. The farmers also sell gardens after mangoes grow bigger in size. Big traders from Dhaka, Chittagong and other areas of the country buy the gardens when mangoes become almost mature. The big traders also buy ripe mangoes from the warehouses and open markets directly or through their agents.

According to agriculture officials, weather has so far been favourable this year for mango cultivation. Horticulture office sources said pest attack has not so far been grave.

Use of firewood in brickfields rampant

NAOGAON, Apr 7: Despite strong concern by environmentalists, local administrations have virtually done nothing to check the growing use of firewood in brickfields in northern district, including Naogaon, reports UNB.

According to a study conducted by an NGO, there are

about 1,482 brickfields in the northern districts and each of them has been set up on 3 to 6 acres of cropland.

It revealed that some 2 crore quintals of timber are burned in brickfields of the region everyday and some 14.5 lakh trees are apprehended to be logged this season if the present trend

could not be checked.

The country has a law, 'Brick Burning Control Ordinance 1992', to regulate the activities of brickfield owners. But the brickfield owners care little about it.

The law makes it mandatory for the brickfield owners to use coal for burning bricks and

prohibits setting up of brickfields on croplands.

Another report from Jessore says: Though the country has a good stock of coals, brickfields owners in the country's southwestern region are burning timber causing extensive damage to the environment.

The use of timber in brickfields as fuel continues to rise as Environment Department and local administration have turned out to be onlookers,' regretted a retired college teacher.

Official sources said there over 600 brickfields in 10 districts of the region and 200-250 maunds of timber are being burnt in each field everyday, raising the total to 1.50 lakh maunds.

But each of the brickfields always shows a stock of about 150 maunds of coal, which are hardly used.

Even though the expense of using coal and timber does not make a big difference, the brickfield owners prefer using logs probably because of its easy availability.

Environmentalists here said forest areas of the region are rapidly shrinking due to indiscriminate logging of trees.

While talking to the news agency, some coal importers said over 20,000 metric tons of coal remained stockpiled at Noapara, the main coal depot of the region, for lack of buyers.



Living with traffic jams Feni has become a town of traffic jams. Photo shows a regular scene of Trunk Road situated in the heart of the district town. — Star photo

PDB-PBS conflict plays havoc with HYV paddy cultivation

Power disruption a common phenomenon in N region

RAJSHAHI, Apr 7: As bumper crops dropped up a sagging economy in last three years, the government strove to ensure power supply for irrigating of rice paddies. But a clash of interests between two power bodies is about to foil its toil.

Agriculture officials said cultivation of high-yielding varieties (HYV) of paddy at the peak of farming season in the northern districts was being hampered severely following conflicts between the PBS and PDB operators, reports UNB.

Load-shedding, low voltage and disruption of power supply became a general phenomenon all over the northern region, considered granary of the country.

Especially Rajshahi, famous for a plethora of quality agro-products, bears the brunt of the jostling between Palli Bidyut Samity (PBS) and Power Development Board (PDB).

Rural Electrification Board (REB), the mother organisation of PBS, launched its operations on January 2, 1980 to reach power to villagers to improve their socioeconomic condition. Through its 67 samities (organisations) so far established, REB has electrified 28,000 villages in 417 thanas

setting up 1.1 lakh power lines in last two decades. It has given a total of 26 lakh connections, including 22 lakh residential and 4,000 irrigation subscribers.

At present around three crore rural people, which calculate 30 per cent of total population of the country, are enjoying benefits of power provided through the REB distribution channels.

The REB-affiliated PBS's purchase power from the PDB following an agreement. As per the deal, said the sources, PDB decided to hand over all its lines, excepting urban ones, to the PBS's and not to connect any more new lines in rural areas.

'But,' PBS sources here alleged, 'in breach of the agreement PDB is installing new lines in the rural areas.' It has set up new lines at Syedpur village in Godagari thana of Rajshahi recently.

At the initial stage following the signing of the agreement, PDB had installed some overhead lines, but stopped shortly afterwards.

They alleged the REB samities were using excessive load surpassing the agreement. In the agreement Palli Bidyut was asked to collect power in tapping process for the time being. They were asked to set up direct 33KV lines connecting grid/33KV PDB substations.

'But they have not yet set up that connections,' one local PDB official said.

Overall power supply situation in the region now fell in an adverse situation as PBSs collect power through tapping system. And so load-shedding and low-voltage problem became rampant, the sources said.

However, the PDB head office in a letter informed the Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources that per-unit power generation cost of PDB is Tk 2.22 while it is supplying to PBS's at Tk 1.77, incurring huge loss each year.

But PBS officials said soon after handover of lines to them PDB loss reduced drastically. 'After handover of lines in Rajshahi, PDB loss in the area decreased to 23 per cent from 32 per cent in 1998-99 fiscal year'.

REB Secretary Shamsul Huq informed that Palli Bidyut had so far given PDB about Tk 470 crore in revenue. The money helped PDB save Tk 150 crore in revenue loss under its own porous distribution system.

Meanwhile, the Power Development Board has asked REB to pay Tk 295 crore in price for the assets and consumers bills taken over by Palli Bidyut by next June 30.

Of the total, Tk 185 crore calculates for the asset prices while Tk 110 crore for bill arrears made over to the REB in the rural power network.

But, PBS officials said, PDB is not handing over all papers, including those on power-consumption bills, in support of its demand. 'So we failed to collect due bills from the subscribers,' said a PBS official on condition of anonymity.

Moreover, PDB people have asked their former consumers not to pay bills to PBS's, alleged General Manager of Rajshahi Palli Bidyut Samity Engineer Habibur Rahman Akhand.

He said to save its consumers from vexing outages these hot days, PDB was shifting load-shedding problem to the rural areas.

And the tangles, irrigation for cultivating Boro paddy is being hampered seriously, which could be perilous in case of any crop failure.

AL-BNP clash in Feni leaves 5 hurt

From Our Correspondent FENI, Apr 7: Five persons were injured in a clash between Awami League and BNP activists at West Chhaganlia here at about 11 am on Monday.

The clash started when Awami League organised a meeting. At that time a BNP procession was crossing. Angry activists of both the parties took part in the clash. They used lethal weapons.

Five persons were injured on the spot. All of them were Awami League activists. Firoz, 30, and Jakir Hossain, 40, of village West Chhaganlia were critically admitted to Feni Sadar Hospital.

Awami League blamed BNP activists for the attack, but BNP denied.

1,200 bags of rice looted from barge

From Staff Correspondent KHULNA, Apr 7: About 1,200 bags of rice were looted from a barge stationed at Daulatpur Shashan Ghat recently.

The rice-laden vessel was bound for Narasingdi from Noapara of Jessore district. According to police, armed miscreants raided the barge, MV Rawnak, at about 11 pm, tied up the crew and looted the rice.

A case was recorded with Daulatpur police station in this connection and police arrested three people.

Typhoid takes serious turn in Mymensingh

MYMENSINGH, Apr 7: Typhoid has broken out in an epidemic form here when about 60 children were admitted to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital in last 15 days till Tuesday, reports UNB.

Typhoid took a serious turn in last three days though it was noticed 15 days ago,' said Dr Mirza Monzurul Huq, Child Specialist in MMCH.

He thought that the problem of safe drinking water might be the cause of spreading the disease.

President of local unit of BMA Dr Mirza Hamidul Huq and general secretary Dr ANM Fazlul Huq Pathan in a statement has expressed concern over the situation. They urged the town dwellers to drink boiled water to avoid suffering.

The doctors also asked the people to be more careful about taking safe food and water and using latrine.

They called upon local administration to take steps to create awareness among local people.

Tragic

From Our Correspondent JHENIDAH, Apr 7: Being denied of justice a rape victim and his mother took poison to kill themselves at Kalomankhal village under Sadar thana recently.

The mother died while the daughter is fighting her life at hospital.

Villagers said the 12-year-old girl was allegedly violated by an influential person in the village on March 6.

The mother of the victim lodged complaint with village elders, but they did not pay heed to them.

Being frustrated both mother and daughter took poison on Monday night.

15 injured as villagers clash in Rajshahi

From Our Correspondent RAJSHAHI, Apr 7: At least 15 people were injured in a clash at Kodalkathi village in Godagari thana last week.

Police said the clash erupted over teasing a girl in the village. A young man named Alexander of the village teased the girl while she was returning home from school.

Later family members of the girl and the youth's supporters locked in clash.

Seriously injured six were admitted to hospital.

A case was filed in this connection.

Sued for extorting toll

MYMENSINGH, Apr 7: The general secretary of Tangail Bus-Coach Owners Association was sued on Thursday under the Public Safety Act for obstructing movement of vehicles on routes to Mymensingh and northern districts for extorting toll, reports UNB.

Mymensingh Motor Owners Association filed the case as a group of miscreants, learnt to have link with local bus owners association, stopped nine of its northbound buses in Madhupur area demanding toll.

Failing to pursue them, the musclemen forced passengers out of the buses, physically harassed them and ransacked one bus disrupting traffic on the route. It was stated in the case filed with Madhupur police.

The traffic movement resumed at about 2pm with the interception of the Deputy Commissioner and Police Super of Tangail who rushed to the spot on information.

News snaps

Day-Labourer electrocuted

PATUAKHALI, Apr 7: Neglect of duty of the local power officials claimed the life of a day-labourer in Kalatola area in the town on Thursday, reports UNB.

Locals said Nitai Ranjan Das, 27, hired by power officials to cut trees along the power lines, died at about 4 pm, an hour ahead of the deadline for transmitting electricity, when a branch of a tree fell on the 33-kv line. Authority of the local power Sub-station earlier had announced through loudspeakers in the town that power supply would remain suspended from 10 am to 5 pm on Thursday for clearing trees alongside the live wires. But, power was supplied at about 4 pm without notice when the cleaning work was going on. A UD case was filed with Sadar thana in this connection.

422 deep tubewells inoperative

PANCHAGARH, Apr 7: Some 422 deep tubewells in greater Dinajpur district, including Panchagarh, remained inoperative hampering irrigation to paddy fields, reports UNB.

According to officials, Boro cultivation on 8,000 hectares of lands in Panchagarh, Thakurgaon and Dinajpur districts has become uncertain as Palli Bidyut Samity disconnected power lines of 341 tubewells due to non-payment of electricity bills. Besides, some 108 tubewells went out of order in three districts as their electric cables and a good number of transformers in the areas were stolen long ago. Power connections to some 1,200 tubewells under Thakurgaon Deep Tubewell Project have been restored after payment of electricity bills. Meanwhile, the arrears electricity bills of 211 tubewells in Dinajpur and 130 in Thakurgaon and Panchagarh districts now stand at Tk 2.85 crore.

19 uplift projects progressing

JHALAKATI, Apr 7: Nineteen development projects are being implemented in Kathalia thana costing Tk 20 lakh, reports UNB.

The projects included development of hats and bazars, construction and reconstruction of roads and bridges, setting up of libraries in educational institutes and renovation of residential buildings of government employees. The works are expected to be completed by June this year.



Poor road signs

Names of road signs are not visible in Nilphamari. This is because of sheer negligence of Nilphamari Municipality authorities. They have become quite indifferent to their duties of renovating the road signs at regular intervals. Photo shows a poor road sign of Asir Uddin Ahmed Lane at Sabuj Para in Nilphamari town. Besides, at present there is no trace of the concrete road sign of Asir Uddin Ahmed Road running from the intersection near the Deputy Commissioner's (DC) official residence to the Headmaster's quarters of Nilphamari Government Boys' High School. Even any town dweller can hardly locate the road sign of Shaheed Captain, Bashar Road, which runs from the New Market intersection, and meets with Asir Uddin Ahmed Road. — Star photo by Z A M Khairuzzaman

Teen killed by fiancé

GAZIPUR, Apr 7: A teenage girl was killed allegedly by her fiancé in Sadar thana early Tuesday, reports UNB.

The dead was identified as Amina Begum, 17, daughter of Hazrat Ali of Khalkur village. Police said Amina, who had an affair with Nazrul of the same village, was called out of house by his elder brother, Habibur Rahman and they poured poison into her mouth. Hearing hue and cry, local people rescued the girl and sent her to Sadar Hospital where she died on Tuesday morning. A case was filed with local police.

Timber recovered from Babupara

BANDARBAN, Apr 7: About 3,000 cubic feet of valuable timber worth about Taka 12 lakh were recovered from Babupara area on the Matamuhuri river recently in a special drive by the Bangladesh Army team, reports BSS.

Official sources said, the recovery timber of Segoon, Gamari and Salalish have been collected from reserve areas of Matamuhuri forest illegally. An army team, in a special drive, recovered the timbers.

The recovered timber was handed over to the Forest Department. A case has been filed in this connection with Alikadam thana.



A town not worth living for children

Brahmanbaria town is now a district town. But the lone children's park here has become a grazing ground of cattle. No child comes here for recreation. So now the town is not worth living for innocent children. Will the authorities concerned take a little step to reshape the children's park properly? — Star photo by Sk Shahidul Islam