

# Direct bus communication with Darjeeling demanded

PANCHGARH, Sept 10: When the Bangabandha transit point was opened three years ago, the government was very enthusiastic. But now officials here say the transit point has contributed little to promoting bilateral trade between Nepal and Bangladesh, reports UNB.

Local people, particularly patients and students, are now demanding of the government for taking steps to introduce direct bus communication between North Bengal and Darjeeling.

It was September 1, 1997 when the commerce ministers of Bangladesh and Nepal inaugurated the transit point at Bangabandha in Tetulia upazila with much enthusiasm to bolster bilateral trade between the two countries. But the enthusiasm did not last long.

"The benefit has so far been achieved from the transit point is minimal and there is no plausible reason to believe that things will take a positive turn in the near future," said an official wishing anonymity.

He said three years have already elapsed since the inauguration of the transit point, but no step has been taken yet for its infrastructure development. The transit agreement signed between Nepal and Bangladesh seems to have been shelved.

As there is no immigration facility in the Bangabandha check-post, many Darjeeling-bound tourists now have to take up circular trips only to waste money.

Bangladesh signed a transit agreement with Nepal in 1976. So did seven SAARC countries during the SAARC summit in 1985.

The SAARC countries also signed SAPTA in 1993 agreeing to take appropriate measures to give transit facilities to each other for bolstering bilateral trade and overall economic development in the South Asian region.

As part of the agreement, a transit route between Bangladesh-Nepal from Bangabandha via Fulbari of India to Kakarbhita of Nepal was inaugurated on September 1, 1997. But it could not be made effective due to non-cooperation of the Indian

government and the absence of wider roads in Bangladesh.

Highlighting the importance of the land route, FBCCI president Abdul Awal Mintoo once in a letter to Finance Minister Shah AMS Kibria had said some 2 million Bangladeshis visit Darjeeling while 10 million visit Nepal every year through different long routes.

He said a large number of tourists would use the Bangabandha transit point if the land route could be commissioned, sending huge revenues into the government exchequer. It will also brighten the prospect of reopening Thakurgaon airport apart from gearing up development activities in the region.

According to local businessmen, bilateral trade with Shillong and Jalpaiguri would be boosted after the commissioning of the transit route in addition to accelerating industrialisation in the region.

They demanded of the government to take necessary steps to reactivate Bangabandha as a full-fledged land port.

# Anti-socials are safe here

From Abdul Monayem Khan

COX'S BAZAR, Sept 10: The number of gay girls and drug addicts is increasing alarmingly throughout Cox's Bazar district causing grave concern for the guardians specially and the people in general.

According to police and local sources, the number of gay girls is increasing day by day in the Cox's Bazar town and other parts of the district, giving rise to anti-social activities. According to local people, the gay girls are found alluring men in court building area, Lal Dighi area, launch ghat, main road, motel road and in some parts of the town.

The gay girls are seen moving freely at different places in the town causing concern among the dwellers. These girls are engaged in immoral activities and spreading venereal diseases among the youths.

The gay girls mostly from poor families are found thronging near cinema halls, bus stand and road sides in search of clients.

Some gay girls said due to acute poverty and finding no other alternative to earn their livelihood they were forced to take up the shameful path.

Meanwhile, venereal diseases among the teenagers and the young people have increased in recent days with the influx of gay girls.

According to physicians, most of the venereal disease patients have got a tendency to conceal the disease as they are illiterate and consequently suffer without undergoing any treatment.

After sun down, the gay come out to the streets to look for the clients. A middle-aged woman at Lal Dighi area in the town is said to be acting as pimp. She is involved in collecting the young girls from different villages on the plea of giving good jobs and later compel them to resort to immoral activities for earning money, it is alleged.

Cox's Bazar thana police arrested about 40 gay girls and prostitutes from some residential hotels in last two months.

The guardian community expressing their grave concern said their young wards are getting spoilt due to the influence of the gays in the town.

Local elite urged the concerned authorities to check the growing menace and take immediate steps to rehabilitate the floating prostitutes and gay girls so that they can lead a decent life.

On the other hand, the number of drug addicts and liquor traders are increasing alarmingly, throughout the district. It is observed that most of the drug addicts are young and only 10 per cent of them are not the teenagers, in both the urban and rural areas.

These young men are addicted to intoxicants and drugs like liquor,

opium, morphine, heroin, tablets, locally made wine, mrita sanjibana sura and some other kinds of liquid containing alcoholic ingredients, the source informed.

It is reported that, most of the addicts visit pharmacies and medicine stores after the sunset for collecting these intoxicants on payment.

Local people have alleged that, Cox's Bazar town and other important places including the upazila headquarters and commercial points in the both rural and urban areas have turned into the open markets of the drugs.

A good number of the drug materials are allegedly smuggled from the Myanmar borders.

These are even sold at comparatively cheaper rates, informed a number of leading people of different areas. Some organised gangs are engaged in transporting all these drugs cheating eyes of the members of the law-enforcing agencies, it is alleged.

Sometimes, some members of the law-enforcing agencies are also found helping the drug traders for reasons better known to them.

Town-dwellers complained that, hemp and liquor are being openly sold in the town and in the adjoining areas with impunity. Besides the school and college-going students, drug users include rickshawpullers, bus, truck and minibus drivers and unemployed persons.

The residents alleged that the addicted persons and others connected with trading, smuggling and storing of drugs have been doing their business under the very nose of the law-enforcing agencies. At sundown drug addicts are seen assembling near different medicine shops which sell intoxicant freely.

According to a recent private survey here, anti-social activities have registered a sharp rise in the areas following increase in drug addiction. Looting, hijacking, thefts and robberies and prostitution have increased causing concern among the local people.

Gamblings are also rampant in the public places. Some organised gangs of miscreants in collaboration with some youths have been committing crimes and anti-social activities.

Women can hardly move out after sunset for fear of being attacked by the hijackers. It is alleged that the situation worsened further due to indifference of the law-enforcing agencies.

Criminals can not be arrested and crimes not reported due to the intervention of a section of local influential people, police said.

# Erosion continues unabated

120 Sirajganj villages devoured in 15 yrs

From Akhteruzzaman Bablu

SIRAJGANJ, Sept 10: Hundreds of people residing along riverbanks are being rendered homeless and landless every year as onslaught by erosions goes unabated. But, in fact, no effective measure has been taken up to find a permanent solution to the recurrent problem. According to unofficial sources, the Jamuna devoured at least 120 villages in the district in the last 15 years.

The erosion-victim people pass hard days after they are rendered homeless. "Neither the government nor the non-government organisations (NGOs) think of us," said Ayezuddin of Gupiakhali village under Shahjadpur upazila. They distribute some relief materials and conduct some rehabilitation works for the flood-hit people, victims of fire, storm and other natural calamities, but they 'keep almost mum' in case of erosion victims, he continued.

"We are really unfortunate. We can draw attention of none. Nobody feels for us," said Abdul Motin, who hails from Kawakhola in Sadar upazila, resides in a slum in Railway Colony area in Sirajganj town. Soliman Ali of Musra in Sadar upazila along with his family takes shelter on embankment. He said no body takes care of us.

The Jamuna, Korotia, Fulzore and Boral flow through the district. The Jamuna and the Korotia erode lands along banks throughout the year, but become very furious during the rainy season. On the other hand, the



Ichhamati, the international river, is continuously devouring lands along the Bangladesh territory in Satkhira district. As a result, Bangladesh territory is shrinking continuously. The international border was originally situated along the brickfields, which are now on the Indian territory. This is due to unabated erosion by the river.

--Star photo by A K M Mohsin

Fulzore and Boral take toll on banks only in the rainy season.

Sadar, Kazipur, Belkuchi, Chowhali, Shahjadpur and Raiganj are worst affected upazilas. However, the district administration does not have statistics regarding rehabilitation activities or the number of ero-

sion-affected people.

Water Development Board (WDB) Executive Engineer Abul Hashem said the office is doing every thing possible to check erosion.

Crates of taka are spent every year to check the erosion. But the permanent solution to the prob-

lem is needed. Local people said long-term measure should be taken up to stop the menace.

The erosion victims migrate to towns in search of works. They usually pull rickshaw or work as day labourer. Some of them also engage themselves in smuggling.

which the construction materials of the 60 square feet width silo-roof along with labours collapsed killing 14 persons including two engineers and injuring 30 others.

After visiting the spot CCC mayor directed the concerned authorities to complete inquiry into the incident immediately and take punitive action against the persons responsible for the mishap.

He urged the owner of construction firm and the consultant now abdicating to surrender to inquiry committee for the sake of impartial and fair probe into the incident.

The mayor also urged the inquiry committee to complete its work immediately so that construction works of the silo of the cement manufacturing company can be resumed.

CCC mayor asked the authorities of the diamond cement factory to give adequate compensation to the members of the victims' family at the shortest possible time.

Meanwhile, director of the Diamond Cement Factory Mahabub Ali refuted the report published in a section of the press that construction works were undertaken without the approval of Chittagong Development Authority (CDA).

Executive director of the factory Azim Ali, other directors, local Ward Commissioners and chairman of local Union Parishad were also present on the occasion.

# Reasons behind collapse of cement factory silo-roof

CHITTAGONG, Sept 10: Faulty design and low quality of construction materials caused the collapse of silo-roof of Diamond Cement Factory at Isanagar on the south bank of the river Karnaphuli here on August 27 last, reports BSS.

An expert team comprising engineers and architects in their instant reaction told Chittagong City Corporation Mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury and journalists during their visit to the cement factory on Thursday.

There was serious fault in architectural design and quality of materials used in centering and shuttering was not capable of taking load of about 167 tons of construction materials' a member of the team and Chief Engineer of CCC Rezaul Amin Khan said.

Besides, the consultant did not supervise the construction works for full time, which was incorporated in the agreement between diamond cement factory and the consulting firm, Khan added.

Executive engineer of Public Works Department and member of the inquiry committee constituted by the district administration to probe the incident also made similar comment earlier. However, final report of the inquiry committee is yet to be submitted, an official said.

City Mayor Mohiuddin Chowdhury and members of the experts team climbed up to the first floor of the silo with a 20 feet high ladder on

which the construction materials of the 60 square feet width silo-roof along with labours collapsed killing 14 persons including two engineers and injuring 30 others.

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# Two more police stations in Sylhet town soon

SYLHET, Sept 10: In the wake of deteriorating law and order situation, the government has taken up steps to set up two more police stations in the town, reports BSS.

Official sources said the Ministry of Home Affairs has in principle approved the proposal of establishing the two police stations to be known as Shah Jalal and Shah Poran thanas.

The police station is understaffed, but people never try to understand our position. They rebuke us if we fail to tackle untoward incidents like clash, murder or snatching," regretted a police official.

Inadequate staff also causes delay in disposal of cases.

Yet worse, the thana has little logistic support. It has only two vans, which are too inadequate for rapid movement of police. The condition of traffic police is also equally grim.

The town is expanding day by day, particularly after it became a divisional town. The volume of traffic is also on the rise but its roads are not expanding accordingly. So, traffic police are now in trouble in maintaining traffic with only one OC, four SIs and 50 constables.

In most cases, the police administration has to deploy reserves police for routine duties although they are supposed to work only in emergency situations. Apart from the town, the police station has to keep vigil on



Professor MA Aziz, Treasurer of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, addressing a discussion on late General MAG Osmani, Commander-in-Chief of Bangladesh Forces during the Liberation War, to mark the 82nd birth anniversary of the late leader on September 1 in Sylhet.

-- Star photo

# A fish deficit area

BOGRA, Sept 10: The production of fish has been declining here day by day due to the shortfall of water bodies, lack of methodical cultivation, proper training pursuing the modern technology and supply of funds, reports BSS.

District fisheries office sources said that the district with nearly 30 lakh population suffer a fish deficit of approximately 18,000 metric tonnes per year. There are 7592 hectares of fish producing water bodies including 80 beels measuring 2397 hectares and 15,698 ponds covering on water area of 4,655 hectares with 2,161 khas ponds measuring 1347 hectares. On an average 19,367 metric tonnes of fish is being produced in the existing sources of water bodies including six rivers in traditional method annually against the annual demand of 36,797 metric tonnes. There are 18,478 members of 3,387 fishermen families including 79 fishermen co-operative societies with enrolment of 4,801 fishermen.

Fisheries sources said that due to flood excessive rain cause heavy losses to the fishermen every year. As a result many fishermen lost their interest in pisciculture. Besides, beels, canals, ponds and rivers have been filling with silt day by day and some water bodies are being converted into croplands in the hands of non-fishermen.

A project concept paper which was earlier approved by the National Economic Council to cultivate fish in 68 water bodies measuring 90 hectares with the target to produce and additional 270 metric tonnes of fish, have been resubmitted, according to official sources.

There are 52 private hatcheries here which produce 30,000 kgs of 'fish renu' every year. These are being supplied to the adjacent districts after meeting the local demands.

There are two government farms, which produced 100 kgs of fish renu and four lakh of fish fry in 1999 with a revenue income of Taka 309 lakh.

Virus invades shrimp farms

KHULNA, Sept 10: Widespread virus attack in shrimp farms caused an estimated loss of about Tk 25 crore in the last fiscal year, reports BSS.

The disease broke out in an alarming proportion mainly in Paikgacha, Dakope, Rupsha and Koira upazilas due to extensive cultivation of shrimp fry imported from Thailand, said a local fisheries officer adding that some 3,000 shrimp farms were affected during the period.

Preferring anonymity the official said the farmers were compelled to use Thal fry, as procurement of shrimp fry was quite inadequate locally to meet the demand.

From 1996 to '99, shrimps worth about Tk 6000 crore were damaged in virus attack in these areas, shrimp farmers said.

In last year, a 100-bigha shrimp farm at Kamrabad in Paikgacha upazila was affected by virus three times, causing an estimated loss of Tk 32 lakh, they added.

FFs' death condoled

From Our Correspondent

SIRAJGANJ, Sept 10: A meeting, participated by leaders of all political parties, to condole the death of four freedom fighters was held on Monday.

The four freedom fighters, who were also local JSD (Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal) leaders, were killed in a road accident at Zopegan in Bogra on September 1.

Presided over by Dr Juhurul Haque Raza, the meeting attended by Home and Telecommunications Minister Mohammad Nasim as chief guest and Fisheries and Livestock Minister ASM Abdur