

Teesta water level falls

Croplands in three districts remain fallow

KURIGRAM, Jan 27: The rapid fall in water level of the River Teesta caused by unilateral withdrawal of water by India forced thousands of farmers in Nilphamari, Rangpur and Dinajpur districts to leave their croplands uncultivated this season, reports UNB.

Teesta Barrage, the country's largest irrigation project, had virtually failed to bring back smile on the faces of the beleaguered farmers in the region as India continues to unilaterally withdraw water constructing a barrage a Gazaldoba, 65 kms off the Teesta Barrage.

Although the first phase work on the Teesta Barrage Project completed on June 30, 1998, most farmers under the project cannot avail of irrigation facility as the barrage surrounded by shoals and sands has no adequate flow of water.

According to officials, the Teesta Barrage Project was, in

fact, taken in 1935. But the work on its started on Dec 12, 1979 at Dalia Doani in Dimla upazila of Nilphamari district.

The barrage was formally inaugurated on August 5, 1990, aiming at producing 20 megawatts of electricity for providing irrigation facility to 13.35 lakh acres of land in 35 upazilas of Dinajpur, Bogra and greater Rangpur districts.

Later, the project was split into two phases, separating the power generation programme from it. Upon completion of the first phase work, some 3.81 lakh acres of land in 12 upazilas of the three districts were brought under irrigation facility.

Various infrastructure works, including excavation of a 380-km canal, an 80-km flood control dam and a 30-km main channel along with a 74-km secondary and a 387-km tertiary channel, and construction of 157 bridges, 353 culverts and 2,000 outlets, were

completed to irrigate croplands in the districts.

Although the authorities expect to produce additional 4.87 lakh mts of paddy and 82,000 mts of wheat from the croplands under the project, some 6,000 acres of land, out of 3.81 lakh acres, have so far been brought under its irrigation facility.

But there have been allegations that the barrage was opened hastily in 1998 in the face of pressure from the government leaving its various infrastructural works like excavation of an 17-km tertiary canal and earth filling incomplete.

To hush up the irregularities, and an amount of Tk 20 crore was later sanctioned to complete the uncompleted works of the project, according to competent sources.

Locals alleged that some contractors did not work as per the project profile.



The teachers of Rajshahi University brought out a procession on the campus recently hailing the historic verdict of the High Court against fatwa. ---Starphoto

Madhukhali Health Complex ailing

From Abdul Matin Fakir

FARIDPUR, Jan 27: A 31-bed Madhukhali Upazila Health Complex is beset with manifold problems depriving the people of proper health-care.

The health complex, has been turned into a nominal institution without rendering health care facilities to mitigate the suffering of the ailing humanity.

Paucity of qualified doctors and medicines, maladministration, corruption, misuse of power, despotism of the complex executives and administrative complexity have gripped the health complex so viciously that the patients have been denied of the treatment, they require.

The health complex was well equipped with modern OT, X-Ray plant, pathological laboratory, labour ward, dental ward and automatic generator facilities since its inception, but all these wards have still been under lock and key for want of doctors medicine, sources and gynaecology. But the

employees against all the sanctioned posts of all the aforesaid departments have been drawing their monthly salaries and other benefits without rendering any service to the patients. Thus a huge amount of government money is being squandered every month.

Hundreds of people submitted memoranda to the relevant higher authorities several times stating the stalemate of the health complex, but to no effect as yet.

It is reported that the present administrative officer of the health complex, Dr Nazrul Islam is a resident of the neighbouring district Magura. In spite of having a government quarter within the health complex campus, he does not reside there. He attends his duties living at his home at a village in Magura district. He virtually has made the complex a private clinic and reportedly indulged in corruption and misuse of power.

He has allegedly rented his government quarter to some body

else and carries on his official works in a room at the dormitory.

Employees of the health complex alleged that Dr Nazrul Islam has got many important works done without inviting any tender which is absolutely illegal.

Besides, there is a written allegation that Dr Nazrul Islam embezzled the entire amount of money sanctioned by the government, for training and entertainment of 11 hundred volunteers to work at 216 vaccination centres.

He left behind wife, a son and a host of relatives to mourn his death.

He was buried at Gupirpara in Sadar upazila. Home and Post and Tele Communications Minister Mohammad Nasim visited the residence of the deceased.

Advocate Golam Sarwar, 55, local Awami League leader and a senior lawyer of Sirajganj Bar Association, died also of cardiac arrest at about 9 pm on January 18.

He left behind wife, one son, one daughter and a host of relatives to mourn his death.

Home and Post and Tele Communications Minister Mohammad Nasim, among others, attended the 'janaja' of the deceased.

Law and order downslide continues in Faridpur

From Abdul Matin Fakir

FARIDPUR, Jan 27: The law and order situation of the district has reached its worst stage.

The people of the district, especially businessmen have become hostages in the hands of terrorist groups Babu Kasha Bahini, Jahangir Bahini, Alamgir Bahini, Selim Bahini, Shahin Bahini, Nuru Bahini and Shamim Bahini.

All these bahinis have blessings of powerful stalwarts.

Now Babu Kasha Bahini is reportedly on the lead in extorting money, snatching, mugging, robbing in broad day-light and other crimes.

It is reported that Babu Kasha Bahini extorted Tk 50 lakh during the holy month of Ramadan from the businessmen, contractors, and transport owners.

A bus owner died of massive heart attack a day before the Eid-ul-Fitr following a deadly threat from Babu Kasha Bahini in demand of Tk 5 lakh as "Eid Bakshish". Following his death half-day transport strike was observed here and a big rally led by municipality chairman

Hasibul Hasan Lablu and bus owners association general secretary Kamrul Hasan Siddique met the Deputy Commissioner (DC) and Police Super and handed over to them memorandum demanding immediate arrest of Babu Kasha Bahini and others.

Living at Kamarpur, his sanctuary, six kilometres off the town on Faridpur-Daulatdia Highway Babu Kasha Bahini let loose a reign of terror at villages Shuvarampur, Shibrampur, Dhuldi, Hat Gobindapur, Brahmananda and Kanaipur over a vast rural areas in addition to the town. The people of the areas have been seized with Babu Kasha phobia.

On December 24 Babu Kasha Bahini and his accomplices made three abortive attempts on the life of the former district Awami League General Secretary Bipul Ghosh at his residence at Goalchamot as he vehemently protested the criminal activities of Babu Kasha Bahini at a big public meeting held here recently.

Besides extortion and terrorism, Babu Kasha Bahini reportedly commit rapes on rural women

both young and elderly.

It may be mentioned here that Babu Kasha Bahini was awarded death sentence in the sensational Firoz Murder Case in the district judge court but acquitted in the high court.

Since his acquittal, he became more atrocious. He had against him more than 50 criminal cases lodged with different police stations.

Bipul Ghosh, former district Awami League general secretary also registered a case against Babu Kasha Bahini with Kotwali thana under PSA on December 25 following futile design on his life. Babu Kasha Bahini reinforced with the joining of top accomplices of notorious Ershad Shikder have been committing crimes unabated to the horror and insecurity of the people of the district at large.

The concerned authority should take stern measures against these criminals to ensure the basic human rights of security to life and property.

Two freedom fighters pass away

From Our Correspondent

SIRAJGANJ, Jan 27: Two freedom fighters died at their residences in the town on January 19 and 18.

Abdus Salam, 56, former president of Sirajganj Medicine Traders' Association, died of cardiac arrest in the early hours of January 19 at his Station Road residence.

He left behind wife, a son and a host of relatives to mourn his death.

He was buried at Gupirpara in Sadar upazila. Home and Post and Tele Communications Minister Mohammad Nasim visited the residence of the deceased.

Advocate Golam Sarwar, 55, local Awami League leader and a senior lawyer of Sirajganj Bar Association, died also of cardiac arrest at about 9 pm on January 18.

He left behind wife, one son, one daughter and a host of relatives to mourn his death.

Home and Post and Tele Communications Minister Mohammad Nasim, among others, attended the 'janaja' of the deceased.

Pirates swoop on trawlers in Bay: 7 fishermen hurt

BARGUNA, Jan 27: Pirates swooped on eight fishing trawlers in the Bay in Roymongal and Hariabhangha shoal areas, 70-km off the town, and decamped with valuables worth Tk 4 lakh leaving seven fishermen injured on Tuesday, reports UNB.

They also abducted three young fishermen Barkat Majhi, Panna and Dalim along with a trawler of Fishermen Cooperative Society and demanded a ransom of Tk 5 lakh.

Sources at Patharghata Trawler Owners Society said the pirates looted fish, fishing nets, fuel and engine parts beating the fishermen. The injured were admitted to Patharghata Upazila Health Complex.

In recent months, piracy in the sea has increased alarmingly in absence of patrol by the naval forces.

The affected trawler owners and the fishermen cannot file any case against pirates as coastal police refuse to take up their cases saying that the pirates do not fall under their jurisdiction.

The society leaders said full implementation of the coast guard programme undertaken by the government and intensifying river patrol could address the growing piracy.

Another report from Noakhali adds: At least 40 fishermen were injured when a gang of armed pirates attacked their boats while they were fishing hilsa in the Meghna river near Char Elahi under Companiganj upazila on Wednesday.

Three of the injured, Bahar, 18, Yasin Majhi, 45, and Azad, 30, were admitted to Noakhali General Hospital.

Arsenic mitigation scheme launched in Chandpur

CHANDPUR, Jan 27: Environment and Forest Minister Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury on Wednesday inaugurated a programme aiming at providing arsenic-free water to villagers at Gulbahar in Kachua upazila in Chandpur, reports UNB.

Earth Identity Project, a non-governmental organisation, will implement the programme in which water will be made arsenic-free with US-invented filters.

State Minister for Planning Dr Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir also attended the programme as special guest.

Speaking on the occasion, the Environment Minister called upon all to come forward in aid of the arsenic-affected people.

She later on distributed water filters among the villagers.

Foreign pirates loot huge quantity of fish every yr

From Staff Correspondent

BARISAL, Jan 27: It has become almost a common phenomenon that every year pirates from Thailand, India and Myanmar loot huge quantity of fish from Bangladesh territorial waters.

According to an unofficial estimate, the foreign pirates have pilfered fish worth about Tk two hundred crore during the last 28 years from more than 700-kilometer-long coastal belt areas and on the Bay Bangladesh fishing trawlers often come under the attack by the pirates.

After the formation of Coast Guard Force in 1995 local people and the fishermen hoped the pilfer-

age of and attack on Bangladesh fishing trawlers by the foreign pirates would come to an end. But their expectation remains unfulfilled.

At the very outset the force showed tremendous success in driving the intruder fishing trawlers out of Bangladesh territorial waters, they said.

Recently a decision was also taken to establish 21 Coast Guard stations in coastal areas. Initially the stations were to set up in Patuakhali, Kuakata, St. Martin Island, Mongla and Hiron point near the Sundarbans. But all initiatives went in vain.

Two mills face acute sugarcane crisis

Production in Joypurhat Sugar Mills and Setabganj Sugar Mills in Dinajpur is being hampered seriously due to acute shortage of sugarcane during the current crushing season, reports UNB.

Acute shortage of sugarcane forced the authorities of Joypurhat Sugar Mills to stop sugarcane crushing for the current season, clouding the prospect to achieve its output target.

The Managing Director of the debt-ridden mills said the mill is poised to suffer a loss of Tk 9 crore this year.

Locals said there is still a chance for the mill to achieve its production target by using the sugarcane lying on the fields.

But the mill authorities said the growers were not interested to sell the sugarcane to them for numerous reasons, including lower rate and complicated payment procedures.

They said the growers prefer selling sugarcane to the power crushers as they pay them higher price than that of the mill.

Mill sources said the target of

sugar production was fixed at 10,914 mts by crushing 140,830 mts of sugarcane. But the mill could produce only 6,970 mts of sugar from 1,02,027 mts of sugarcane.

Production in Setabganj Sugar Mill in Dinajpur is being hampered seriously due to shortage of sugarcane.

Official sources said the mill so far produced some 4,226 metric tons of sugar crushing 61,145 mts of sugarcane against the target of 8,800 mts of sugar from 110,000 mts of sugarcane.

The mill is facing acute crisis of sugarcane supply from the beginning of the season, as the farmers are interested to supply the same to power crushers.

Despite a government ban, a large number of power crushers are operation in the mill areas to prepare molasses from the sugarcane.

When contacted a leading sugarcane grower Ramjan Ali said that he preferred power crusher as its rate is higher and mode of payment is easy than that of the sugar mill.

Jamuna shoal brings fortune for them

A photo feature by Akhteruzaman Bablu



Innumerable shoals emerge in the River Jamuna throughout the year. A section of so-called contractors in collaboration with some touts collect sand of these shoals through day labourers at a nominal price. They carry it by boats and store it in front of Sirajganj Town Protection Embankment. Photos on top (L-R) (1) Some bare footed day labourers are seen carrying sand in severe cold from the boats, (2) sand is being dumped in front of the town protection dam in connivance with some middlemen. So-called contractors reportedly sell this sand on contract basis to fill up various ditches of the town and elsewhere. As a result the government is being deprived of revenue, but the government officials are quite indifferent to this practice. Bottom photos (L-R) show (3) the suppliers earn a good amount of black money by supplying sand through trucks, (4) a deep ditch situated on the rear side of the town and in front of the Sadar thana is being filled up by sand.

Orange Cultivation Dev Scheme in Sylhet

SYLHET, Jan 27: Growers of the district have got back their inspiration in orange and pineapple cultivation following the initiatives of agriculture officials, reports UNB.

To bring the frustrated growers back in cultivation of these fruits, the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) has taken up a programme titled "Orange Cultivation Development Scheme" in the district.

Apart from this, (DAE) has also taken up another scheme, involving Tk 25 crore, to save the production from flood and provide irrigation during dry season.

DAE will start implementing the two projects, approved by the ECNEC, after receiving the fund, an official source said.

The growers here have already started planting saplings inspired by the officials concerned.

The agriculture officials have placed the two projects to the higher authority following the Prime Minister's call to revive the orange cultivation tradition of the district during her recent Sylhet

visit.

Growers had lost their interest in orange and pineapple cultivation due to lack of adequate technical knowledge, fund, preservation and marketing facilities and some other problems.

Under the scheme, the authority provided training and distributed saplings to the growers free of cost.

Besides, 10 demonstration orange orchards have been set up in Golapganj, 10 in Bianbazar, one each in Companiganj, Kanaighai and in Goainghat and two in Jaintapur to acquaint the farmers with the modern methods of cultivation.

News snaps

51 shops gutted

NOAKHALI, Jan 27: Some 51 shops were gutted in a devastating fire at Shahajibazar in Sadar upazila of the district on Saturday night, reports UNB.

Police said, the fire that originated from electric short circuit in a tea stall at 3 am soon engulfed the adjacent shops. The loss was estimated at Tk 35 lakh. Market sources said a total of 33 shops burnt fully while 18 others partially. Local people after three hours of frantic efforts brought the blaze under control.

Jainul Abedin's birth anniversary

MYMENSINGH, Jan 27: The 86th birth anniversary of Shilpacharya Jainul Abedin was celebrated here, reports BSS.

In this connection an art and painting competition for children was held on the premises of Jainul Abedin Shingrahasala (gallery) last week. The competition was organised by the Shilpacharya Jainul Abedin Shingrahasala. It was inaugurated by Deputy Commissioner M Rafiqul Islam. About 2000 children of three age groups participated in the competition.

Foodgrains sanctioned

KISHOREGANJ, Jan 27: Relief and Rehabilitation Department has sanctioned some 2,769 metric tons of paddy and wheat under the Food-for-Work Programme for implementing 300 small projects in 13 upazilas of the district this fiscal, reports UNB.

The upazilas are Sadar, Itna, Hossainpur, Kuliarchar, Bhairab, Karinganj, Tarail, Katiadi, Mitamoin, Astagram, Bajitpur, Nikli and Pakundia. The project works include construction and reconstruction of roads, culverts, excavation and re-excavation of canals and derelict ponds, and earth works of different educational as well as religious institutions.

5,949 power lines disconnected

JOYPURHAT, Jan 27: Authorities have disconnected 5,949 power lines under Joypurhat Palli Bidyut Samity for non-payment of bills, reports UNB.

Official sources said the outstanding electricity bills now stand at over Tk 2 crore and the consumers did not pay the bills despite repeated reminders. The authorities also fined 60 unauthorised electricity users Tk 3.31 lakh and realised Tk 58,381 from 26 for their involvement in installing illegal connections. Of the total outstanding bill, Tk 23.47 remained unpaid by commercial consumers, Tk 77.91 lakh by residential consumers, Tk 31.76 lakh by consumers in the irrigation sector, Tk 47.82 lakh by industrial consumers and Tk 1.22 lakh by the government for streetlights.

Shops ransacked: 18 sued

CHANDPUR, Jan 27: Eighteen people were sued under the Public Safety Act (PSA) after they allegedly ransacked three shops and logged trees at Manuri village in Faridganj upazila Wednesday, reports UNB.

Witnesses said a group of armed people allegedly led by Afzal Hossain damaged three shops, cut trees and looted goods and valuables. Police said the accused had created a reign of terror by capturing the shops at Fakir Bazar on Hajiganj-Ramganj road. Muhammad Shahadat Hossain, on behalf of affected shop owners, filed the case under PSA with the local first class magistrate court.

Cop killed in road accident

JHENIDAH, Jan 27: A policeman was killed in a road accident in the town Wednesday night, reports UNB.

Police said Ashraf Hossain, 50, wireless operator of Kotwali thana, was critically injured when a motorcycle hit him while he was coming to the office at about 7 pm. He was first rushed to a local hospital and then shifted to Magura Sadar Hospital. He died while he was being moved to Dhaka in a critical condition.

Human rights activist sued

BOGRA, Jan 27: A case was filed against a human rights activist under the Public Safety Act for allegedly violating human rights, reports UNB.

According to the case filed with a local court, Advocate Sadrul Anam Ranju, local unit coordinator of Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust, and three others misbehaved with the female members of a house in the town on Jan 18. They went to the house for interviewing the women in absence of its male members. Ranju allegedly threatened the women and left the house when neighbours rushed to the spot hearing hue and cry. Meanwhile, police have been asked to take legal action against the accused.

Paddy procurement drive begins

KHULNA, Jan 27: Aman paddy and rice procurement drive has begun in 10 districts of the Khulna division with targets to procure 8,596 mt of paddy and 21,493 mt of rice, reports UNB.

The districts are Khulna, Bagerhat, Satkhira, Jessore, Meherpur, Jhenidah, Magura, Nariail, Kushtia and Chuadanga. Officials said paddy would be procured at Tk 8 while rice Tk 12.50 per kg. Respective Upazila Nirbahi Officers (UNOs) will supervise the drive, which will continue till Feb 28. But the procurement drive is unlikely to achieve the target as paddy production was hampered in most of the districts due to last year's flood. Aman paddy will be bought from the farmers directly while rice from the dealers, according to the officials.

517 schemes undertaken

HABIGANJ, Jan 27: The government has undertaken 517 development projects in the district for the current fiscal in a bid to develop rural roads and educational institutions, reports UNB.

District Relief and Rehabilitation office under its Rural Infrastructure Maintenance and Food-for-Work programmes will implement the projects using 2,641 metric tons of wheat. The projects include construction of rural roads, culverts, bridges, dams and earth filling, and renovation of schools and mosques.

Loan for farmers

NETRAKONA, Jan 27: Bangladesh Krishi Bank will distribute farm credit amounting to Tk 39.79 crore among farmers of 10 upazilas in the district this fiscal, reports UNB.

Bank sources said the loan would be given to the farmers to purchase cattle, seed, pesticide and other agri-inputs, and undertake income-generating projects like pisciculture, poultry and dairy farm. Meanwhile, the bank has disbursed Tk 13.17 crore among 10,575 growers of the upazilas through its 20 local branches. A BKB official said the bank had taken necessary steps to expedite the loan distribution for making the current Rabi crop farming programme a success.

Uplift schemes taken up

CHUADANGA, Jan 27: The implementation work of two schemes at a total cost of Taka 8.42 lakh by the local Government Engineering Department under its post-flood Rehabilitation Programme in Sadar upazila has just started, reports BSS.

According to an official source, the ongoing schemes include repair of 13,600 metre road and construction of five drains on Dingedahdah-Darshana via Hizolgar Road and reconstruction of 120 metre Shaheed Pasha Road. Both the schemes are expected to be completed by March next.

Motorcyclist killed

MAGURA, Jan 27: A motorcyclist was killed in a road mishap while returning to his village from the town recently, reports UNB.

Police and hospital sources said Waliar Rahman, 27, of village Zagla in Sadar upazila was run over by another motor cycle at Zagdal area on Jan 15 injuring him seriously. He was rushed to the Sadar hospital where he succumbed.

Heroin seized

MYMENSINGH, Jan 27: Police and Narcotics Control Department in a joint raid arrested four people along with heroin and phensidyl from Krishnapur Malancha colony in the town on Sunday, reports UNB.

Acting on a tip, the team led by a magistrate raided the house of Nuru Pagla of the colony and seized 29 tiny packets of heroin and 10 bottles of phensidyl. The arrested were identified as Shah Jamal, Shah Kamal and Shah Alam sons of the house owner and their accomplice Emdadul Huq of neighbouring area. A case was filed.

Tk 3.5 lakh contraband seized

CHAPANAWABGANJ, Jan 27: The anti-smuggling task force seized Indian goods worth about Tk 3.5 lakh from an Iswardi-bound train at Nachole railway station Friday, reports UNB.

FFs receive allowance

PANCHAGARH, Jan 27: State Minister for Post and Telecommunications Abdur Rouf Chowdhury recently distributed allowance among 135 freedom fighters at Sadar upazila in the district, reports agency.