

# Ganges Barrage Project stalled for 20 years

**UNB, Kushtia**  
The Ganges Barrage Project, undertaken in the early 80s, was meant to offset the adverse effects of Farakka Barrage in 25 southwestern and north-western districts.  
But unfortunately the ambitious project could not be implemented in last 20 years although the successive governments were committed to completing it.  
Unilateral withdrawal of the Padma water by India constructing the Farakka Barrage dealt a severe blow to the ecosystems in 25 districts, and the Ganges Barrage Project was aimed at protecting the districts from the impending desertification.  
The districts are Rajshahi, Chapainawabganj, Naogaon, Natore, Sirajganj, Pabna, Chuadanga, Kushtia, Narail, Magura, Jhenidah, Jessore, Satkhira, Khulna, Bagerhat, Barisal, Patuakhali, Barguna, Jhalakati, Pirojpur, Bhola, Shariatpur, Rajbari, Madaripur and Gopalganj.  
After the construction of the Farakka Barrage, experts said, salinity in water and soils of the districts has marked an alarming rise while recurring floods caused by siltation and the opening of its sluice gates during monsoon damages crops worth Tk 5,000 crore in the region every year.  
According to them, the ecosystems in the region, including the Sundarbans, have been affected badly as groundwater level continues to dip and soil moisture deplete.  
Officials said the government took up the Ganges Barrage Project in 1980 at an estimated cost of over Tk 1,131 crore in a bid to maintain the ecological balance and save crops and property of the people from recurring floods and droughts in the region.  
Accordingly, a project implementation cell was formed under the auspices of Water Development Board (WDB) and later in 1984 a separate

office was set up for its successful execution.  
The officials said a Tk 10 crore feasibility study was taken up for the project for which Tk 4 crore was initially allocated, but the study was ultimately sent into cold storage due to lack of fund as the remaining Tk 6 crore was never allocated for it.  
An analysis by WDB showed that the flow of water in the Padma was relatively low during monsoon and high during the lean period before the construction of the Farakka Barrage.  
The contentious Farakka Barrage began operating from April 21, 1975 following a temporary accord signed between Bangladesh and India to run the feeder canal of the barrage from April 21 to May 31. But India continued to withdraw water violating the agreement.  
Since 1975, the water flow in the Padma continued to fall during the lean period and in April 1993 the lowest water flow was at 230 cusecs.  
According to sources at WDB, at least 40 tributaries of the Padma River, including Mahananda, Baral, Gorai, Karatoa, Atrai, Punarvaba, Pagla and Nagar, and some 1.5 lakh ponds, canals and beels, water bodies (water bodies), including the country's largest Chalan Beel, have already dried up.  
The drastic fall in water level of the Gorai affected standing IRI-Boro crops on about 50,000 acres of land in Kushtia, Meherpur, Chuadanga, Jhenidah and Jessore districts.  
The GK project pumps cannot operate during Aus season since 1993 causing a production loss of Tk 100 crore every year.  
According to experts, imminent desertification in 25 districts caused by the Farakka Barrage can be halted by properly implementing the Ganges Barrage Project.

## 35 road development schemes

**UNB, Manikganj**  
The government has undertaken 35 projects to improve the rural communication network of Manikganj district during the current fiscal year. Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) is implementing the projects at a cost of over Tk 1.50 crore.  
The projects include construction, reconstruction and maintenance of rural roads, bridges and culverts in six upazilas. LGED Executive Engineer Abdul Hye said over 80 per cent of the work has already been completed and the rest will be completed by the end of March.

## Bar Association election held

**UNB, Jhalakati**  
The election to District Bar Association was held at the bar council auditorium at Jhalakati on Thursday.  
Yusuf Ali Molla and Jahangir Kabir were elected president and general secretary respectively. Besides, Kabir got 62 votes while his rival Zahurul Haque Khokan 43. Other office bearers are: Haider Hossain (Vice-president), Mosharrarf Hossain and Nuru Hossain (Joint secretaries).

# Cabin, paying bed patients at MMCH pay 'extra money'

**OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh**

Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCH) authorities are charging patients, admitted in cabins and paying beds, additional money for the last few months.  
The authorities charge patients on the plea of ensuring cleanliness, although there are sweepers appointed by the government for doing the job.  
Each patient admitted in cabin is to pay Tk 100 while a patient in paying bed is to make payment of Tk 50 as 'surcharge'.  
When contracted, the Director of MMCH, Colonel Md Ismael Hossain, told The Daily Star that they are taking extra money to give

the patients better services including ensuring hygienic surroundings. When asked if he has any written order from the authorities concerned to realise extra money from the patients, Hossain parried the question.  
There are 153 paying beds and 80 cabins at the 500-bed MMCH. The patients especially from other districts are admitted in cabins or paying beds when general beds are not available.  
However, some patients alleged they are not getting extra services or facilities, although they are paying extra money.  
During a recent visit, this correspondent found the surroundings are not hygienic. The condition of

toilets at different wards is beyond description. Most of the toilets are out of order.  
According to official sources, recently the MMCH authorities have appointed 37 staff, including 12 sweepers, at their own initiative spending Taka 74,000 per month for improving the services.  
As the MMCH is the only medical college hospital in greater Mymensingh, it always faces rush of patients everyday. Due to lack of adequate beds, patients often stay on floors and corridors, creating unhygienic surroundings.  
The patients of surgical paediatric and obstetric wards are the worst sufferers. The surgical patients have to wait for weeks to get operated upon. At least 100 patients are found waiting in 30-bed paediatric ward during this correspondent's visit to MMCH.  
Local people have urged the authorities concerned to take immediate steps to improve the services of the hospital.

## Master plan to ensure poor men's food, health service

**BSS, Jessore**  
The work of a master plan has begun to ensure food and livelihood for the poor and helpless people living in Jessore Municipality area.  
An amount of Taka 3 crore will be spent to implement the plan. CARE-Bangladesh and its associate five NGOs will complete the work jointly with Jessore Municipality.  
S M Kamruzzaman Chunnun, Chairman of Jessore Municipality

said this scheme is being implemented in two municipalities all over the country through a new method. CARE-Bangladesh will give all the back ups of this scheme for the first three years with the financial help of US AID and Jessore Municipality will do the rest of the work in the next seven years.  
The plan would be implemented on the basis of four conditions.

## 67 out of 126 charge-sheeted persons of November 27 Sirajganj incident get bail

**AKHTERUZZAMAN BABLU, Sirajganj**

Sixty-seven persons out of 126 leaders and activists of the four-party alliance who were earlier charge-sheeted under Public Safety Act (PSA) by Belkuchi Police got bail on Wednesday.  
Sixty-nine leaders and activists of the alliance on Wednesday surrendered to the Sirajganj District and Sessions Judge Court. Out of the surrendered persons, Jubo Dal leaders Shamim and Altaf Hossain were sent to the jail *hajai*.  
Of the charge-sheeted people, Belkuchi upazila BNP president Haji Jamal Uddin Bhuiyan, its general secretary Golam Mostofa, joint secretary Abdur Razaque, Jatiyo Party leader Omor Faruque Provat, District Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Moulana Ali Alam were also included.  
According to court and police sources, at about 5-30 pm on November 27, the activists of four-party alliance brought out a procession at Mukondagati bazaar in Sirajganj urging all to maintain the sanctity of the holy month of Ramadan which began on November 28.  
At one stage the processionists attacked a hotel and a medicine shop of an Awami League leader and set on fire the establishments. All the belongings and materials of the hotel and medicine shop were burnt to ashes. An investigation was made to the effect. According to the investigation officer, as a sequel to

the four-party leaders and activists' attack, a clash ensued in the area and 50 persons were injured. As a result 50 people were injured.  
Following the attack, Awami League leader Fazlul Haque who owned the medicine shop filed a case on November 28 accusing 49 opposition alliance leaders and activists under PSA with Belkuchi Police.  
After investigation the inquiry officer submitted the charge-sheet against the four-party alliance leaders. Following submission of the charge-sheet, the opposition leaders termed the matter as misuse of PSA, because the cases were false and fabricated, according to them.  
Belkuchi upazila BNP president Haji Jamal Uddin said that the ruling party violated the existing rules of the country. He also accused that the ruling party terrorists on November 27 attacked the opposition four-party procession with firearms and lethal weapons. According to him, the ruling party terrorists set on fire the aforementioned shop including 20 more houses, three cinema halls, several other shops and looted all the goods. They also attacked and injured 50 activists of the opposition four-party alliance. But he alleged, police did not take action against them and no case was received at the aforementioned police station.  
Meanwhile, the four-party leaders condemned the charge-sheet and demanded a judicial inquiry into the incident.



**An old man scales a date tree to extract juice at a village in Sadar upazila in Satkhira district. Date juice is a popular drink in rural Bangladesh.**

## People taste date juice in rural areas

**ABU AHMED, Satkhira**  
Extraction of date juice has been going on in full swing in Satkhira

district since the winter began. Date juice is a very popular drink in Bangladesh. As a bone-chilling cold wave sweeps across the country, people in rural Bangladesh savour date juice.  
The extraction that began from the starting of the winter will continue till the end of the spring.  
Winter brings festive mood among the rural people from the time immemorial. Farmers take new Aus paddy to houses from the fields. Women are now busy making pitha, the traditional cake, made of newly harvested rice flour, date molasses and date juice.  
People mainly produce molasses from the juice. After continued boiling date juice, popularly called ras, turns into molasses.  
A man who scales a portion of the date trees to extract juice is called gachhi. The gachhis take out a portion of the bark on the top of the trunk from where juice oozes. The juice is stored in a container hanging round it. Gachhis collect juice in the morning.  
The gachhis are now busy scaling date trees to collect date juice for making 'khejurer gur' (date molasses). The date juice is in great demand among the people. A glass of date juice is now being sold at Taka one in different bazaars in the district.  
Satkhira district is famous for quality date juice. Date trees grow abundantly in the district.  
According to an unofficial estimate, there are at least 45,000 date trees in seven upazilas of the district. Some 450 tons of date molasses of various qualities are produced in Satkhira annually. Now date molasses floods local markets.  
One kg of quality date molasses is now being sold at Taka 25 to Taka 30. But the poor gachhis are not getting the fair prices as the markets are being controlled by a number of middlemen.

## Poultry farming faces setback

**UNB, Kushtia**  
Though poultry farming has gained popularity in Kushtia district as an income generating and self-employment creating occupation, it is now facing setback due to numerous reasons. Local poultry farm owners said there are no cold storage facilities here to preserve eggs and lack of treatment facilities to the poultry birds caused huge loss to them.  
At present there are over 2,000 poultry farms and a large number of unemployed youths are engaged in poultry farming. In absence of cold storage facilities the farm owners have to sell their eggs at throwaway prices. Besides, many owners were forced to close their farms due to lack of marketing facilities and shortage of buyers.

# NEWS SNAPS

**Accused of a murder case killed**  
**UNB, Narayanganj**  
Just after a few hours of his release from jail on bail, an accused of a murder case was hacked to death in Mahmudabad area in Rugganj upazila under Narayanganj district on Wednesday night.  
Family sources said one person named Dulal called away Misir Ali, 40, an accused of Russel Bhuiyan killing case, from his house and stabbed him indiscriminately some 200 yards off his residence. Ali died on the spot. Ali's wife Hena lodged a case with Rugganj Police accusing Dulal, Farid, Sharif, Rabiul, Kaizza and Aju in this connection.

**Sachchu Murder Case: 19 chargesheeted**  
**UNB, Kushtia**  
Police on Wednesday submitted the chargesheet of the sensational Sachchu murder case indicting 19 people.  
Mamud Hossain Sachchu, chairman of Haripur Union Council and leader of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, succumbed to his injuries at the Bangabandhu Medical University Hospital on July 16, 2000 after being seriously wounded with bullets sprayed by the terrorists on July 11. Of the accused, one person named Himel was in jail *hajai*.

**Two kids burnt to death**  
**UNB, Barisal**  
What is fun to one may prove to be fatal for others. Two little siblings met the tragic end of their lives as other kids set fire to a straw hut in Golachipa upazila on Thursday. Hospital and family sources said the victims -- Suma, 4, Anna, 6, daughters of Hamed Khalfia of Badnatai village -- were playing hide-and-seek with other kids in a field in the evening.  
During the play, the victims hid in the hut. Having failed to trace them out after a long search, the other kids torched the hut while they were returning home. As they did not return home, their worried parents searched around for the kids for hours and later recovered them from the ashes. But it was too late. Suma died on the spot while Anna on way to hospital.

**Schoolgirl slaughtered by miscreants**  
**UNB, Chapainawabganj**  
A schoolgirl was slaughtered by unknown miscreants in Nachol upazila on Sunday.  
Police said Fancy, 15, a class nine student of local Golabari High School, was missing since she went out of their house for school on January 28. Police recovered her body later in the evening from a desolate spot, half a kilometer away from her residence. A case was filed.

**BIWTC launch stranded**  
**UNB, Barisal**  
A BIWTC passenger launch was stranded for about eight hours with over 1,000 passengers on board in a tributary of the River Meghna here on Wednesday.  
The Barisal-bound launch, PS Lepcha, from Dhaka had to make halt in the midstream of the river near the Hizla river due to thick fog. They said dense fog blanketed the entire southern region, including Barisal, early Wednesday forcing many river vessels to make unscheduled halts. The Barisal-bound other launches from Dhaka also arrived here six hours behind their schedules.

**Eight ferries stranded**  
**UNB, Rajbari**  
Eight ferries in Rivers Padma and Jamuna on Daulatdia-Aricha route were stranded for about five hours due to thick fog on Thursday.  
The ferries carrying some 140 vehicles stuck in the midstream of the rivers inflicting sufferings on hundreds of passengers. Ferry movement on both sides of the ghat (terminal) resumed after 8 am on Thursday.