NATIONAL

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(Left) Extraction of stones is going on unabated by digging earth along the river bed in a quarry area in Sylhet district, (middle) people of all walks of life including women are engaged in collecting stones and (right) heaps of stones collected from the quarry.

Stone quarry in Sylhet threatens environment

IQBAL SIDDIQUEE, Sylhet

The hilly river Dholai and stone quarry in the bordering Companyganj upazila in Svlhet have become a boon for many while a bane for others. The course of the river is getting changed in some places while it is

being silted up at many points. On the other hand, there has been rivalry between the interested groups or people over the stone quarry and its attached lands for years together. Besides, internal feud, repression on labourers, discrimination in payment of wages, illegal toll collection and clashes between the groups have become a regular affair in the area. Recently, interested groups of villagers have been locked in rivalry after getting no space or land along the nearby area of the quarry. Even, a good number of them have already erected kutcha structures in the area.

Over 50 thousand people including women are engaged in different jobs around the Bholaganj quarry. Among them, about 35,000 are engaged in stone collection by small country boats locally called 'BARKI.' Every morning, gigantic activities begin along the whole quarry area. Motors (shallow engines) are also engaged in stone collection in the quarry.

Thousands of people engaged in the stone extraction in the quarry originally hail from Kishoreganj, Netrakona, Mymensingh, Brahmanbaria and Comilla, besides, a good number of people from the four districts of Sylhet division. These poor men and women, dependent on the stone collection iob for livelihood area are being deprived in many ways.

Organised gangs of illegal toll collectors who have blessings from the political leaders are very much active here. Besides, law enforcing people like police also have very good relationship with such groups of toll collectors. A man gets Taka, 120 to Taka 150 as wage per day while it is Taka 100 for a woman

This year the trader-labourers did not get 'site' for dumping/stockpiling the stones along Katakhal area. They have now taken possession on the khash lands on the bank of the river illegally for stockpiling the extracted stones. Even, many of them have already erected kutcha structures on the khash lands without taking permission from the government. In the pervious years, they used to stockpile the stones there. But, this year they have to stockpile the stones at the bank of the Nayagang and carry those to Katagang by truck for stockpiling. This is why, the price of stones has already gone up by Taka 7 or Taka 8 per cft. With the arrival of monsoon, the stones would be transported to different destinations by big cargo vessels. Indiscriminate and haphazard process of stone collection caused a

serious problem for the environment/ecology of the whole region.

The Shah Arpin tila small hill has already been collapsed due to the indiscriminate collection of stones due to abrupt digging in the attached lands over the past few years. The area has now become a land of random looting of natural wealth

Due to largescale and unplanned extraction of stones by digging ditches (from much depth) over about 10-kilometre long hilly area, huge loss has been caused and the area has already been damaged. Besides, about 5

kilometres area along the Zero line has also been damaged

Due to random digging and extraction on the 'No man's land' areas, a number of border pillars have already been untraced. Immediately it should be stopped, it is widely felt.

A severe environmental disaster along the 200-square kilometre area is being apprehended. A section of officials in the Ministry of Mineral Resources have been blamed for causing such a situation as they issue 'allotment' for pieces of lands along the quarry areas and others indiscriminately for stone collection. These are being done without any prior report or opinion from the local authority or administration or revenue officials. Such a 'liberal' policy by the ministry people is totally responsible for the above mentioned disastrous situation, opined an administration official, here, Anybody can obtain such a permit or allotment from the ministry only by paying an amount of Taka 10,000 to Taka 20,000, he said. It is a clear violation of the standing rules of the government, said the official adding, Wagf land can not be allotted this way.

Stones worth crores of taka is being looted from the Waqf land belonging to the Shah Arpin Tila, attached to the majar of the great saint Shah Arpin. The shrine of the saint is also now on the verge of erosion/ruination. Inhabitants of about 20 villages of the nearby area are now apprehending an early hilly flood and erosion before the monsoon starts.

Eid celebrated in dists

offered prayers at congregations at



Two children embracing each other on the occasion of Eid-ul-Azha in Magura town.

BSS, Ctg/Rajshahi/Khulna/N'ganj

The holy Eid-ul-Azha was celebrated in all the districts of the country with due solemnity and religious fervour.

Dewanbazar C and B Colony Maidan, Baizeed Bostami Dargah Masjid Maidan, Chittagong Medical College Mosjid Maidan, Baitush Sharaf Juma Mosjid Maidan, Chandanpura Darool Ulum Alia Maidan, Lalkhan Bazar Jamaitul Madrasa Maidan, Mehedibagh CDA Colony Jam-e-Mosque Maidan, Kadam Mobarrak Shah-e-Jam-e Masjid, Omargani MES College Maidan, Miskin Shah Mosjid Maidan, Wajedia Ali Madrasa Math, Kalurghat FIDC Complex Masjid Maidan and Feeringibazar Jam-e Mosjid.

Labour and Employment Minister MA Mannan, Civil Aviation, Tourism, Public Works and Housing Minister Engineer Mosharraf Hossain, Chittagong city mayor a ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury, who are performing Haj in Saudi Arabia, conveyed Eid greeting to the peo-

To mark the occasion, government and different organisations Mohammad Selim Uddin, City Khalispur, Daulatpur, Boyra, Mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu, local Rupsha, Tutpara, Baniakhamar political leaders and government and other areas of the city. officials attended the congregation.

In all the congregations, prayers were offered for the peace and Another jammat was also held prosperity of the nation and harmony of the Muslim Ummah.

Besides, Eid congregations were also held at Tikapara Eidgah Eid said congregations were Maidan. Police Line Maidan, held in different parts of Shaheb Bazar Chattar, Helanabad Narayanganj town including Eidgah Maidan, Rajshahi Tanbazar Jame Mosque, Chashara University Jame Mosque and Nur Mosque, Fakir Tola Mosque, different open spaces of the city. Railway Mosque at DIT, Netaiganj Baitul Izzat Mosque, BIWTA Another Eid congregation was also

Rangpur JP activists go on rampage

dalism

UNB, Rangpur

The Supreme Court (CSC) order staying bail of HM Ershad evoked sharp reaction when his party activists went on rampage in Rangpur town on Monday evening leaving 20 people injured.

Witnesses said angry Jatiya Party workers came out on the demonstration in front of the DC's street in a procession at 7-45 pm, Office on March 11 and a dawn-tochanted anti-government slogans, dusk hartal in Rangpur district on ransacked roadside shops and March 13. damaged running vehicles while passing by the press club. Supreme Court on Monday stayed High Court order on Sunday granting bail HM Ershad, who was given

Police said some five cars, four motorbikes, 50 rickshaws and 30 shops were damaged and five rickshaws torched during the van-

Joypurhat Sugar Mills may fall short of target



Rivals' clash leaves 10 hurt UNB, Bogra

A clash between two rival groups at Chakakashtara village in Sadar upazila of Bogra district on Monday left 10 people injured, three of them seriously. Police said the clash ensued when one group led by Habibur Rahman attacked the house of their rival group leader Hazrat Ali following a dispute over a plot of land.

Three of the seriously injured identified as Sadek Ali. 50. Golam Hossain. 50. and A Gani were admitted to the local hospital while others were released after first aid. A case was filed against five people in this connection.

Extortionists get 10-yr RI

UNB. Habigan

A court in Habiganj has sentenced five people, including two in absentia, to 10 years Rigorous Imprisonment (RI) in an extortion case. The court also fined the convicts Siraj Mia, 30, Shahjahan, 25, Bachchu, 27 (absentia), Iqbal, 25 and Aktar, 23 (absentia) of village Mohonpur area in the municipality Tk 10,000 each, in default, to suffer two years RI more

The case, in brief, was that the accused hurled a cocktail on Dr Dipak Kumar Debnath of Sadar Hospital while he was returning to his Goshpara residence in the town on Nov 4, 1994 for refusing to pay them tolls. The injured physician was rushed to the hospital in a critical condition. A case was filed and after investigation police submitted charge sheet against them. After examining the witnesses and records Assistant Sessions Judge M Belayet Hossain awarded the punishment on Feb 28.

Chapainawabganj PBS incurs loss UNB, Chapainawabganj

Chapainawabgani Polli Bidyut Samity (PBS) incurred a loss of Tk 1.76 crore in last five years, officials said. PBS sources said they spent Tk 7.13 crore to provide power to their customers against the income of over Tk 5.37 crore during the period. Officials of Nawabganj PBS said they incurred loss worth Tk 43.62 lakh during the last fiscal year alone

Current system loss of local PBS is 18 per cent, they informed adding it owes Tk 7 lakh to consumers. Since the beginning of 1995, local PBS so far provided electricity to 26,310 commercial and household units of 375 villages, they added. They said they set up 1,044-km power lines in addition to the 493-km lines received from Power Development Board. Officials also informed they have taken up a plan to set up more 350-km lines in the current fiscal year.

Crisis of drinking water UNB, Khagrachhari

Steady fall in groundwater level in the three hill districts has created an acute crisis of pure drinking water forcing the people to take pond water. Over 5 lakh people, out of 12 lakh, in rural areas of Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachhari districts are drinking water from ponds, canals and other water bodies, inviting various waterborne diseases. According to a UNICEF report, nearly 46 per cent people in these districts drink

water from ponds, lakes, cascades, wells or canals while 54 per cent from tubewells or supply water. Meanwhile, a large number of tube-wells went out of order as groundwater level continues to dip in the region

Tk 1cr touchstone recovered UNB, Thakurgaon

Bangladesh Rifles recovered a touchstone worth over Tk 1 crore from Sukanpukuri village in Sadar upazila in Thakurgaon on Saturday.

Acting on a tip, a patrol team of BDR raided the village and recovered the one-meter high and 43-centimeter wide stone from under the ground of a house. The touchstone was sent to Dhaka for preserving in the National Museum

1.20 lakh textbooks allocated

UNB, Pirojpur

Government has so far allocated 1.20 lakh sets of textbooks for the primary schools of Pirojpur district. Officials said 32,460 books have been allocated for class one, 16,331 books for class three, 18,200 for class four and 53,200 for class five.

The books will be distributed among the students of Nazirpur, Nesarabad, Kaukhali, Sadar, Bhandaria and Mathbaria upazilas. Book distribution has already been started

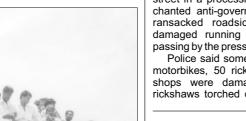


PHOTO: STAF

In Chittagong the main Eid Jamaat under the auspices of Chittagong Central Eid Jamaat Committee was held at MA Aziz Stadium at 7.45 am Maulana Sayeed Abu Noman, principal of Darul Ulum Madrasa, led the congregation.

Another large congregations under the management of Chittagong City Corporation was held at Jamaitul Falah National Mosque premises at 8 am and another at 8.30 am.

Besides, congregations were also held in 41 wards of Chittagong city under direct supervision of the respective ward commissioners. Other remarkable Eid congregations were held at Andrakillah Shah-E-Jam-E Mosjid, Amanat Shah-Dargah Maidan, Laldighi Maidan, Parace Corner, Agrabad Jamboori Field, Port Stadium Maidan, Railway Polo-ground Maidan, Metropolitan Police Line Masjid Maidan, Nasirabad Housing Society Maidan. Sugandha Jame Mosjid, Sher-Shah Colony Maidan, Chittagong University Eidgah Maidan and Bahadderhat WAPDA Colony Maidan.

A large number of people also

chalked befitting programmes which included hoisting of the national flag atop all private and public buildings, decoration of thoroughfares and road islands with miniature flags and festoons inscribed with "Eid Mubarrak" in Bangla and Arabic, illumination of important buildings, serving improved diets among the inmates of jails hospitals and orphanages.

Special prayers were also held at all mosques seeking continued peace and progress of the nation as well as greater solidarity of the Muslim Ummah.

The Chittagong stations of Bangladesh Beter and Bangladesh Television are airing special programmes marking the occasion.

In Rajshahi national flags were hoisted atop all government and non-government buildings. Important places, roads and road islands were decorated with national flags and banners and festoons inscribed with Fid-Mubarak in Bangla and Arabic. The main Eid congregation was

held at 8 am at the Shah Mokhdum (RA) Central Eidgah Maidan, which was led by Alhaj Moulana

Jasim Mela concludes

Defying ban on carrying passengers beyond capacity the bus owners are still resorting to the old habit of overloading their vehicles at Siraigani point along the Dinajpur-Dhaka Highway. After Eid-ul-Azha people have started going back to the capital city from their village homes.

> held only for females at Lal Mohammad Eidgah Maidan. Improved diets were also served

there later.

to local jails, hospitals and orphanages on the occasion

In Khulna main Fid congregation was held at Khulna Circuit House Maidan at 8 am which was attended by State Minister for Relief and Disaster Management Talukder Abdul Khaleque, Whip Mostafa Rashidi Suja, KCC Mayor Shaikh Tavebur Rahman, local elite and people from all walks of life

Principal Abu Shaleh led the jamaat.

Eid congregations were also held at Khulna Town Masjid, Alia Madrasa Ground and in Chanmari, Gallamari, Nirala, Sonadanga,

Mosque, Kalir Bazar Mosque, Naluapara Jame Mosque, Deobhag Madrasha Mosque and Masdair Eidgah Maidan.

Hundred of devotees attended the congregations and sought blessings of Almighty Allah to free themselves from sin.

The congregations over, sacrifice of animals began. Improved diets were provided

for inmates of the hospitals, jails and orphanages.

Government and private building were illuminated in the evening. Eid was celebrated in all other districts of the country in a similar manner.

Work on Eco Park

begins Mar 15

Production target in Joypurhat Sugar Mills may not be achieved in

UNB, Naogaon

the current season as sugarcane growers are keen to produce molasses instead of sugar Mill sources said that sugarcane

growers in the mill zone are not selling sugarcane to the mill, rather they themselves started producing molasses for earning more profit. The mill authority fixed a target to

produce 10,914 mts of sugar after crushing 1.41 lakh mts of sugarcanes this year. "But, this year, production of

sugarcane is not plenty against the target fixed by the mill authority," said a grower adding, "so we have decided to produce molasses with our sugarcane.'

He also said that the mill rate of each maund of sugarcane is Tk 41 and only Tk 30 remain in their hands after bearing the transport and other necessary costs.

On the other hand, the growers get almost double the amount from the same quantum of sugarcanes by producing molasses, another farmer said

Although production of molasses is prohibited in the mill zone, the growers are illegally running power tillers and power crushers in the areas violating the ban. In this circumstance, mill authori-

ties apprehended drastic fall in

Smuggled goods flood Sirajganj markets

openly in different markets before the eyes of the law enforcing agen-

the law enforcing agencies, are in fact, helping the smugglers in carrying out their illegal activities in exchange of huge bribe.

Locals said smuggling of various goods, including Indian bullocks, sugar, slat, bicycles, imitation and gold ornaments, spice, lungis, crockery and dry cell batteries are rampant along the areas. Huge

sugar production.

Though the price has been raised farmers of Thakurgaon district are showing reluctance to supply sugarcanes to the sugar mills. In the current season, the price of sugarcane has been raised to Tk 41

Some 20 people were also

Later, the JP leaders held a rally

The programme included sit-in

The vacation bench of the

30 days' detention under the Pecial

Powers Act on March 1

injured in the melee. They were

at Paira crossing and announced an

action programme to protest stay of

bail to the former President.

given treatment in different clinics.

from Tk 37 per maund. But many sugarcane grower are selling each maund of their produce at Tk 60 to the molasses producer instead of sugar mill's procurement centres as they are getting cash money from them

Bablu, a grower of Boda upazila supplied all his produces to Khuchabari carrying in five vans due to its high price

He said, "I am supplying sugarcane to Khuchabari instead of sugar mill to avoid uncertainty and complicity in getting the sale proceeds." General Manager (Agriculture) of

Thakurgaon Sugar Mills said though four power crushers and 18 locally made machines have been seized but three power crushers and over a hundred machines are engaged in making molasses in the district.

A huge quantity of molasses is being manufactured in remote areas of Begunbari, Danarhat, Shibganj and Pokati, they added.

The price of molasses has also shot up here this season and each kg is being sold between Tk 22 and 25

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sirajganj

Smuggled goods which flooded Sirajganj district are being sold cies. Local people and business community alleged that members of

trucks with the help of road ser-

geants and law enforcers.

quantum of such items are coming into the country every day. Unemployed youths, boys and girls who live near the border areas are allegedly carrying out smuggling business and acting as carries of the smuggled goods, said local people.

Activities of smugglers have been intensified following the relaxation of checking border trade. On the other hand Sirajganj road point on Dhaka-Dinajpur Highway is a main point in the northern region to carried smuggled goods from the border area to Dhaka by bus and

and is expected to be completed soon

Monument in memory of aborigine

leader

UNB, Naogaon

A monument will be constructed in memory of aborigine leader Alfred Shoren at Bhimpur village in Mohadevpur upazila of Naogaon district where he was killed.

Shantu Larma, leader of PCJSS and Chairman of Chittagong Regional Council, laid the foundation stone of the monument on February 24. Alfred Shoren was hacked to death by terrorists on August 18, 2000.

Livestock development schemes

UNB.Bandarban

Local Livestock Department has been implementing massive development schemes under poverty alleviation programme to make the hilly people in Bandarban self-reliant.

It disbursed credit over Tk 5.45 lakh among its 50 beneficiaries since 1996-97 fiscal. sources said. Of the total, sources said, Tk 2.4 lakh was given to eight people for cow farming, Tk 1.37 lakh to 11 for beef fattening, Tk 94,500 to 25 for goat farming, Tk 57,000 to three people for poultry farming projects and Tk 16,300 to 13 people as loan.

Workshop on woman rights

UNB. Magura

A daylong workshop for creating mass-awareness in establishing women rights was held in Magura Thursday

District Information Office in collaboration with Unicef organised the workshop. A total of 22 representatives of local mass media, news agencies and national dailies took part in the workshop. The journalists were given training on various issues, including development to children and women, child and woman rights, and ways to prevent polygamy, early marriage and child labour. Presided over by District Information Officer Javed Iqbal, the workshop was addressed, among others, by Amirul Hasan, Adv Arzu Siddiqui, Deepak Roy Chowdhury, Shamim Ahmed Khan and Khan Sharafat Hossain.

Eye camp in Faridpur

UNB, Faridpur

Some 67 poor cataract patients were operated upon and 360 others provided with foods, medicine and spectacles free of cost in a weeklong free eye camp in Faridpur.

BNSB organised the camp and doctors of its local unit conducted the operations and treatment in the camp that ended recently in Andha Kalyan Eye Hospital premises. Civil Surgeon Dr SM Abul Khair Mia was present as chief guest on the concluding day of the camp.

Science Week concludes

UNB, Sherpur

A three-day National Science and Technology week concluded at local Model Girls' Institute recently.

Atiur Rahman Atique MP inaugurated the week, which was attended by Pro Vice Chancellor of Dhaka University Dr Muhammad Shahadat Ali as special guest. Some 70 projects of science clubs of the different schools and colleges had been put on display at the fair highlighting the importance of science and technology in the day to day life. Acting chairman of the local municipality, political leaders and other elite addressed the occasion with Deputy Commissioner Sheikh Abul Kalam in the chair.

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

A month-long Jasim Mela (fair) commemorating the 98th birth anniversarv of Palli Kabi Jasimuddin concluded on February 28.

The fair organised by Jasim Foundation was held on the vast shoal land in the neighbourhood of the poets' ancestral house at Gobindapur on the outskirts of the town.

The products of cottage industries and handicrafts of rural Bangla were displayed in 114 stalls set up in the fair. Besides jatra, circus and cultural functions were held every night attracting thousands of spectators both male and female from rural and urban areas virtually, the venue turned into a meeting place of rural and urban cultures.

Mohiuddin Ahmed, vice president of Jasim Foundation and eminent cultural personality presided over the concluding function attended by

Deputy Commissioner Ashfag Mabud as chief and special quests Hamid and Police Super Md Abdul respectively.



Artistes of Faridpur Shilpakala Academy rendering a dance drama at a function of the two-week long Jasim Palli Mela in Faridpur which concluded recently

Work on a Eco Park surrounding the Madhabkundu and Muraichhara waterfalls in greater Sylhet begins on March 15. A source of Parliamentary standing committee on Environment and Forest Ministry said the proposed Eco Park would be established without shifting the Khasia

UNB, Sylhet

tribes. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina announced in October 1999 that an Eco Park would be established here soon.

Later on ECNEC approved the proposal of Eco Park surrounding Madhabkundhu waterfalls of Baralekha upazila and Muraichhara waterfalls and Patharia forest in Kulaura upazila of Moulvibazar district. The cost for the Eco Park was estimated

at Tk 11 crore and work is expected to be completed by end of 2003-2004 financial

year. The Eco Park will be based on Madhabkundhu area and surrounding 654 acres of forestland including 400 acres of reserve forest, 145 acres of tee garden and rest are private land.

Annual maintenance cost of the Eco Park was estimated at Tk 50 lakh.

Forest and Environment Minister Syeda Saieda Chowdhury assured that the tribal people would not be evicted from the area and provisions would be there to create income-generating activities for the Khasia tribes