

NEWS SNAPS

Jubo Dal activist shot dead

OURCORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

An activist of the BNP-backed Jubo Dal was gunned down at Biyaripara under Kotchandpur upazila in Jhenidah district on Monday noon.

Police said Sayeed Hossain, 25, a resident of Biyaripara, was shot at point-blank range while he and some of his associates were talking inside a room near the upazila BNP office at about 12:30pm. He was rushed to the Jhenidah Sadar Hospital where the attending doctors declared him dead. Meanwhile, police arrested a close associate of Sayeed on Monday night from his residence following a murder case filed at Kotchandpur police station in this connection. The arrested, Bakhtiar, is an identified terrorist of the area involved in various anti-social activities. Police also said that Sayeed himself was wanted in a number of criminal cases.

Greek ship drifts away

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Chittagong

A Greek flag carrying ship drifted away following gusty wind from the river mooring at Chittagong Port early Tuesday morning, port sources said.

184-meter long oil tanker Hellax Endurance, however, escaped a major casualty after it lost anchor at about 5 am and reached mainstream of the river Karnaphuli, sources said.

Ship movement at Chittagong port channel remained suspended till 12 noon on Tuesday as the oil tanker was towed to port jetty, port sources added.

The ship arrived at Chittagong port on March 25 loaded with 28,000 tons of refined oil

from a Middle East country.

Two foreigners protest news of arrest

BSS, Bandarban

Two foreign nationals, an Australian and a French, have denied that they were arrested and are staying in the Chittagong Hill Tracts without valid documents. In a rejoinder, the two foreigners who preferred anonymity protested a news item about their arrests published in a section of press recently claiming that it was not based on facts.

The couple is in the district reportedly as part of their thesis work on a particular tribal community. District police sources and other government agencies have also termed the news as not correct. They said the two foreign nationals have been staying here with proper permission and with all necessary papers.



A different type of stall stole the show at the five-day Sherpur Agriculture Technology Transfer Fair-2001 which concluded at Nakla in the district on March 25. The stall which was established by Agriculturist Kaem Uddin, Upazila Agriculture Officer of Sribordi in collaboration with two officers and four others of his office won the first prize on the concluding day. He showed through a model the process of environmental degradation in detail.

Integrated action plan needed to re-excavate rivers of S-W region

UNB, Kushtia

Integrated action plan is needed immediately to re-excavate the rivers of southwestern region of the country, which were heavily silted affecting navigation and causing scarcity of irrigation water.

Experts said it was imperative to bring back ecological balance, check going down ground water level, developing of pisciculture and availability of surface water for irrigation.

In absence of dredging, 25 big and small rivers flowing through the region have become almost dried at places in the dry season giving rise to environmental degradation, salinity, arsenic contamination, scarcity of safe drinking water and decrease in moisture contents of the soil.

Water and soil experts said desertification of the region caused by unilateral withdrawal by India of waters of the Padma and Teesta rivers in the upper reaches has resulted in poor flow in the downstream.

It has also increased soil salinity in 21 districts of the country by 40 per cent, they said. As a result, they apprehended that more than 1.20

core acres of cultivable land in southwestern and northern districts of the country might turn into barren arid land.

Excessive withdrawal of water in upper reaches of the Padma has been increasingly lowering the moisture content of the soil in Southwestern and northern Bangladesh.

Quoting a study on the country's present condition of soil moisture, an expert said, critical point of lowest percentage of moisture in the soil usually recorded in April or May before 1975 but now it starts happening in February.

"It has squeezed land acreage and the quantum of Rabi crops in greater Rajshahi, Pabna, Kushtia, Faridpur, Jessore, Khulna and Barisal districts, experts said.

Rise in salinity of surface water and intrusion of soil salinity in the districts due to the fall in the level of the River Padma will force change the cropping pattern in those districts, he added.

The water flow available in the Padma at Hardinge Bridge point can not save the loss of moisture in the soil of other districts. The main two tributaries of the Padma are Gorai and Mathabhanga.

Water of these two rivers flowing

through Jhenidah, Magura, Narail, Kushtia, Meherpur, Chuadanga, Jessore and Sathkira maintained the soil moisture and ecological balance of the region.

But at the off take of the River Gorai and Mathabhanga silt deposited so much so that no water could go through these rivers reducing the moisture contents of the soil making the land arid and the river beds have been used now as cultivable land.

Off take of the River Mathabhanga is situated in the middle point of Chilmari union of Kushtia district and Jalangi of the district of Murshidabad in India. Off take have been silted up due to low flow of water for a long time and off take has never been dredged.

The River Bhairab, which depends on water of Mathabhanga has been dried up. One decade ago Bhairab-Mathabhanga Project was taken up by Water Development Board. A foreign firm conducted feasibility study and work started, but the fate of that project is not known.

If implemented water could be preserved and used for irrigation in dry season. The River Chitra, a tributary of the River Bhairab, is also dead. About one hundred-mile long

upstream of the Chitra is dead. If the River Chitra is re-excavated vast area in Jhenidah, Magura and Narail could be irrigated.

Another river Nabo Ganga is also dead. The 70-mile long Nabo Ganga has been silted up. The riverbeds have become now cultivable lands in Jhenidah and Magura districts with irrigation by ground water.

The conditions of rivers Kumar and Kali are also similar and the sources of these two rivers are the Gorai. The Dakua river is also dead with the implementation of GK project. Boma and Begabati rivers are also dead. Some 60 mile-long riverbed has been turned into cultivable land.

The rivers Hanu Teka, Jamuna and Sree have also met the same fate. The Gorai river is dead as the off take of the river have been silted up.

Government has taken up a plan to re-excavate the off take of the River Gorai and the work is going to be completed in June next. If the River Gorai could be brought in its normal flow then salinity in the southern region may be stopped, water experts said.

Culprits get away with textbook scandal in Netrakona?

JAHANGIR ALAM, Netrakona

Police have failed to make any headway in the sensational textbook scandal in Netrakona.

Police on February 19 seized some 10,000 copies of textbooks from house of Helen Mostafa, an appointed contractor by the District Primary Education Office for carrying textbooks to different upazila Education Offices, in Azhar Road area in the district headquarters.

It is alleged that the woman was trying to sell the books in black market instead of taking the books to upazila education offices.

No one has been arrested so far in this connection.

When contacted, Sub-inspector of Netrakona police station Abul Kalam, who is also the investigation officer in the case, said the seized books are now in custody of the court.

He added that the contractor told the court that she received these books from District Primary Education Office and she was supposed to take these to Durgapur and Kendua upazila education offices.

District Primary Education Office sources said the contractor

received 34,800 books on January 14, 2001 and 70,400 books on January 28, 2001 meant for Kendu upazila education office and 45,252 books on February 18, 2001 meant for Durgapur upazila.

But it is mystery that those 10,000 books were stored in her house instead of warehouse, local people said. It is almost certain that the books were stored in her house only for selling in black markets, they added.

Local people have urged the officials of the Ministry of Education to look into the matter and take necessary action against the culprits immediately.

One to die for rape

UNB, Pirojpur

A special court in Pirojpur on Monday awarded death penalty to a man for raping a girl.

According to the prosecution, Abul Hossain of Jagonnathkathi village in Swarupkathi upazila of the district violated a 10-year-old schoolgirl of the same village on March 1, 1998.

Innocent youth freed on bail after 10 months in jail

UNB, Khulna

Noor Hossain, a young grocery shop owner, arrested without any case against him and held in the jail for more than 10 months was freed on bail by the court on Sunday.

While granting the bail, the Third Sub-Judge's Court directed the police to submit report explaining why Noor Hossain was arrested instead of the real accused Noor Mohammad in a criminal case.

Bangladesh Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights (BSEHR) moved the court following a report that a young innocent man has been languishing in jail without trial for the last 10 months.

The report had further said police wrongly arrested Noor Hossain instead of Noor

Mohammad, an accused in a criminal case and thrown him into jail without any trial.

BSEHR talked to Noor Hossain inside the jail and carried out a thorough investigation into the plight of the young man who had a small grocery shop at Phulbarigate Bazaar, adjacent to Khanjahan Ali police station.

The investigation revealed that SI Kiron Babu picked up Noor Hossain from his house on the night of June 1, 2000. Babu demanded bribe to release him, but poor Noor Hossain could not satisfy Babu.

Kiron Babu was later promoted and transferred to Khulna as Court Inspector. He is now believed to be posted in the police headquarters.

The report said Noor Mohammad, the actual accused in

the case, fled to Dhaka city and was subsequently killed in a shoot out with rivals.

"Lust for bribe, irresponsibility and inefficiency on the part of the police have caused immense sufferings and inhuman condition of Noor Hossain in jail," said the BSEHR report.

It recommended punishment to Kiron Babu and Moyenuddin, two police officers, who were found responsible for the woes and long ordeal of poor Noor Hossain.

BSEHR demanded that human rights activists should be given easy access to different jails and thana hajots for investigating into violation of human rights by police and civil administration.

18,680 hectares brought under Pabna Irrigation, Rural Development Project

UNB, Pabna

Pabna Irrigation and Rural Development Project is providing irrigation to 18,680 hectares of land in the current season with a target to produce Tk 100 crore additional crops.

Officials said Tk 500cr is needed for the 2nd phase work and they are discussing with donor agencies in this regard.

When the project went into operation completing the first phase in 1992, it provided irrigation to only 2,000 hectares of land. The ultimate target of the project is to bring 21,862 hectares of land phase by phase, sources said.

Work on the project, located in the northwest of the confluence of the River Padma and Jamuna, began in 1983 with the financial assistance from the ADB and IFAD. The first phase work cost Tk 500 crore.

Surrounded by the rivers Boral and Hurasagar in the north, Jamuna in the east and the River Padma in southwest, the project area covered nine upazilas of Pabna, two upazilas of Natore and one upazila of Sirajganj.

Aiming to supply water in the project area, 43km main irrigation canal, one siphon, one DTO, 20

secondary canals, 53 tertiary and 15 minor canals, and two pumping stations in Bera and Koitola have been set up.

Under the project, 158km long flood protection embankment, 23 sluice gates and 146km long water discharging canal have also been constructed.

For convenience of the farmers of the project, 42km metal road, 120 culverts, eight track bridges and 36 footbridges have been constructed.

In the current fiscal, Water Development Board undertook Jamuna riverbank protection work. After completion of the work, officials hoped, flood control embankment would be saved.

Sources said around 55 per cent area under the project remained under water for most part of the year and was vulnerable to erosion before start of the project.

As an indirect benefit of the project, 184,543 hectares of land has been protected from recurrent flooding and 138,812 hectares from water stagnancy.

The project not only benefited the farmers, but also widened employment opportunities for the local day labourers, who are getting opportunity to work throughout the year, locals said.