

NEWS SNAPS

Body of girl recovered in C'nawabganj

UNB, Chapainawabganj

The beheaded body of a young girl was recovered from Charmohonpur area of Chapainawabganj town on Thursday.

The deceased identified as Ferdousi, 13. Police said Ferdousi was married with her cousin Ziaul, 18, three years ago. But Ziaul divorced her two months back due to lack of adjustment. Later she was killed mysteriously on Wednesday and her body was recovered from near her house on the next day. None was arrested in this connection.

Rally to create awareness against polythene

UNB, Bagerhat

In an effort to create mass awareness against the use of polythene shopping bags district administration arranged a colorful rally in Bagerhat town Saturday.

Deputy Commissioner Plus De Costa led the rally attended by over 5,000 town dwellers including teachers, students, cultural activists and NGO representatives. The rally starting from the stadium concluded at old court premise after parading different thoroughfares in the town. Local municipality started its programme of collecting the used polythene and purchasing the same at Tk 7 per kg. Official sources said these would be burnt down after collection.

Fabrics worth Tk 30 lakh gutted in N'ganj

UNB, Narayanganj

Fabrics and cotton worth over Tk 30 lakh were damaged in a fire at the storehouse of United Commercial Bank (UCBL) in Nayamati area of Narayanganj town Monday night.

Witnesses said the entire area of Nayamati, the hub of the country's hosiery business, was overcast with smoke when the fire broke out at the UCBL storehouse at about 9 pm. Firefighters from Mongalpara and Hajipara brought the fire under control after three hours of hectic efforts. Five people, including a firefighter, were injured. The firefighters suspected that the flame might have originated from a burning cigarette as workers were loading and unloading goods there just before the smoke went up.

Cancellation of exam centre protested

UNB, Kushtia

Examinees demonstrated in Kushtia town Tuesday demanding cancellation of the decision to shift local honours and masters examination centre under National University.

The examinees under the banner of All Party Students Unity paraded the main streets and damaged a passing microbus at the Thana traffic crossing.

Aman procurement drive progresses slowly

ABU AHMED, Sathkira

The official aman procurement drive in seven upazilas of Sathkira is about to end in a failure due to the price-hike of paddy and rice in markets following a dismal harvest.

Not a single grain of aman rice has been purchased in six upazilas till writing of this report on February 1. Only 45 metric tons of rice have been purchased in Tala upazila while not a single grain of aman paddy and rice has been purchased in Assassuni and Shyamnagar upazilas during the period.

On the other hand, the Food Department managed to purchase only 66 metric tons of paddy and 45 metric tons of rice against the target of 2,927 metric tons of paddy and 1,420 metric tons of rice respectively.

Aman rice is selling between Tk 13.50 and Tk 14 per kg in local markets now against the government procurement rate of Tk 12 per kg.

Aman paddy is also selling at higher prices than the government rate of Tk 8 per kg as suppliers are reluctant to proceed towards LSD

godowns.

Most of the millers are reluctant to sell paddy and rice to the LSD godowns because of much less quantity of allocation given to some selected millers, a senior official said.

The growers are also reluctant to supply their products to government godowns due to non-availability of necessary quantity of gunny bags and comparatively high rate of carrying cost, he added.

In many cases, supplied rice with over 14 per cent moisture has been rejected by the godown officials, he said.

UNB from Jhenidah reports: Rice procurement drive has failed in Jhenidah in the current season.

Only 60 mts of paddy and 2,595 mts of rice have been procured against the target of 2,448 mts of paddy and 3,274 mts of rice. The last date of procurement was February 28.

According to District Controller of Food the procurement rate of each kilogram of paddy and rice was fixed at Tk 8 and 12.50 respectively. But the farmers were reluctant to sell their paddy and rice to

the purchasing centres, as the prices were high in the market.

The government rate was fixed including one per cent vat charge, but per kg paddy and rice are being sold in the market at Tk 8.50 and 13.50 respectively.

According to food officials the collection target was fixed at 564 mts of paddy and 1891 mts of rice in Sadar, 384 mts of paddy and 298 of rice in Shailakupa, 213 mts of paddy and 213 mts of rice in Harinakunda, 486 mts of paddy and 187 mts of rice in Kaliganj, 145 mts of paddy and 272 mts of rice in Kotchandpur, 656 mts of paddy and 413 mts of rice in Moheshpur upazilas.

But no paddy could be procured from Shailakupa, Kaliganj, Kotchandpur and Harinakunda upazilas during the drive and no rice from Shailakupa and Harinakunda upazilas.

Some farmers who came to sell their paddy in the weekly market said to this correspondent that selling of paddy and rice to the government godown is a complicated process, so they do not feel interested to supply food grains to the government stores.

Blacksmiths facing hard days in Magura

HOSSAIN SERAJ, Magura

Hundreds of blacksmiths in four upazilas of Magura are facing hard days because of lack of patronisation, price-hike of raw materials, crisis of fuel and charcoal and problems in setting up welding shops.

Now the blacksmiths find it difficult to stick to their ancestral profession.

Besides, they do not get fair prices of their products due to lack of marketing facilities. Very often they are forced to sell their goods below the production cost.

An elderly blacksmith of Notunbazaar area in Magura town said there had been about 3,000 blacksmith families in four upazilas of the district only a couple years ago, but now the number has come down to around 1,200. Many of them have already abandoned their profession for the cause of survival while some others are also thinking so finding no other alternatives.

Most of the blacksmith shops are situated in and around Magura town, Ranagar, Gangnala, Thakurbar, Lankikandar, Boro Kasudi, Kalinagar, Ukkurpara, Shibrapur, Alomkhali, Katakhal, Gobindpur and Tengakhali bazaars in Magura Sadar upazila.

In addition to this, a large number of blacksmith shops are situated at three other upzilas and in rural areas throughout the district.

The blacksmiths who left their ancestral profession so far have not found any suitable job and are leading sub-human lives with their



PHOTO: STAR

An elderly blacksmith works at his shop in Magura. Now the blacksmiths, in large number, are deserting their forefathers' profession due to manifold problems including financial hardship and lack of government patronisation.

families.

They have no scope for getting bankloans through cumbersome process to run their business. They are mainly depending on the moneylenders who usually realise high interest up to 100 per cent of the borrowed money, concerned soupses said.

Blacksmiths need second-hand iron, steel, gas pipes, charcoal and other raw materials to run their business. But the prices of these materials have been increased by five to six times than only five years ago.

Now a days each kilogram charcoal is being sold at rates

between Tk 20 and Tk 22 at different places, which is higher by about four times than only five years ago.

At the same time, the demand for products like spade, are, hoe, plough-share, rake, sickle, knife and household articles produced by the blacksmiths has fallen significantly in recent years. In most cases they are forced to sell their products without any profit. As a result their products hardly cover the costs for the raw-materials.

Now blacksmiths in Magura urged the authorities to provide them with short-term loan and necessary patronisation to help them carry on with their ancestral profession.

Stolen rice along with truck recovered

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sirajganj

Stolen rice worth Tk 3 lakh was recovered on Thursday night from the godown of a rice trader in Tangail.

Police recovered stolen rice from the godown of rice trader Abdus Salam at Bhuapur bazaar. The truck was also recovered.

On Wednesday night an armed robbery was committed at Bangabandhu Jamuna Bridge West near the Industrial Park area on Dhaka-Bogra highway.

Police and witnesses said, a gang of armed robbers numbering about 15 to 20 came to the spot with a truck and obstructed the Thakurgon-Manikganj bound rice loaded truck and at gun point and hijacked the truck with 175 sacks of rice valued about Tk 3 lakh. They hid the rice along with the truck at Bhuapur bazaar.

A case was lodged with Bangabandhu Bridge West police station.

Punishment demanded

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Feni

Members of the Feni unit of Bangladesh Sangbadik Samity arranged a meeting and brought out a procession in the district town recently protesting the killing of Senior Staff Reporter of The Daily Purbanchal Haru-n-or-Rashid alias Khokan in Khulna on March 2.

The procession was brought out from a local weekly office 'Front'. The processionists paraded the main road in the town and went to the DC office where they handed over a memorandum to Prime Minister through the DC of Feni A F M Solaiman Chowdhury.

After handing over of the memorandum a protest meeting was held at the DC office premises where Nurul Karim Majumder, president of Feni unit of Sangbadik Samity and Feni correspondent of The Daily Star presided over.

Kaunia-Tetulia rail line construction scheme unimplemented

UNB, Rangpur

An ambitious scheme to construct 120-km meter-gauge rail line in between Kaunia of Rangpur and Tetulia of Panchagarh is lying unimplemented for last 24 years.

A high-powered team completed the survey on the feasibility of construction of the proposed Kaunia-Tetulia rail line in 1978 and subsequently a scheme was submitted with the higher authorities for its final approval.

But it is yet to be approved for reasons best known to the authorities. Tetulia frontier situated in the extreme north of the country is lacking rail link.

As a result, lakhs of people of the

area have to cover about 200-km distance by road to reach Kaunia. The actual distance of Tetulia from Kaunia is about 120-km only.

An official of the Lalmonirhat Railway Division said that the scheme was practically prepared to set up rail communication linking Tetulia, Nilphamari Sadar, Damar, Dimla, Atowari, Debiganj, Kishoreganj Sadar and Gangachara upazilas with Kaunia.

About 50 lakh people of the region have been facing immense suffering for years together in absence of better communication.

The local leaders demanded of the government to implement the project without further delay.

Ambulance of IU medical centre inoperative

RAHAT AHMED, Kushtia

The ambulance of Islamic University (IU) medical centre remains inoperative since its damage by some angry students in the last Ramadan.

The students damaged the ambulance after being failed to shift a patient to hospital by it. Since then the vehicle remains inoperative for the last five months.

Now the emergency patients have been facing immense sufferings as there is no other ambulance at the medical centre.

A large number of students alleged that some doctors used to allow the student leaders to use the ambulance for political and personal purposes in exchange of favour from the major parties.

Despite several complaints, the authorities concerned did not take any punitive measure. Nobody knows when the ambulance will be

operative again.

Moreover, at night the students remain totally insecure as there is no night shift duty in the medical centre.

Masked robbers loot house in Comilla

UNB, Comilla

Bandits looted cash and valuables worth over Tk 60,000 from a house at Ranir Dighirpar of Comilla town on Saturday night.

Police said two masked robbers snapped the electricity connection of the house of Mahabubur Rahman Rocket at about 11pm and wanted shelter saying that miscreants chased them. Later they took hostage his minor son at gunpoint and decamped with the booty.



PHOTO: STAR

CARE, Mymensingh chapter brought out a colourful procession in Mymensingh town on the occasion of the International Women's Day on March 8.

Silt in 5 rivers hampers navigation

UNB, Shariatpur

Accumulation of heavy silt in the rivers across Shariatpur and neighbouring Madaripur is hampering navigation seriously.

Locals said the situation turned critical this year as the silt raised the riverbeds carried with the water during the flood last year.

Innumerable shoals have emerged in the rivers Padma, Aryal Khan, Kumar, Kirtinagsha and Palardi causing serious difficulties in the plying of launches, steamers and trawlers.

At some points even the country boats are facing problems due to the sharp fall in the water level. The

affected river routes include Madaripur-Dhaka, Madaripur-Chandpur and Madaripur-Shariatpur.

With the drying up of the mouths of Pajkhal and Taltala canals, the launches from Shariatpur to Dhaka have to ply via Chandpur which add 50 extra miles to the journey.

"The passengers as well as the transport owners have to spend more money for the journey and it takes five more hours to reach the capital from the district headquarters," said a source.

Besides, ferry movement at Mawa, Sheikhpur and Kazirtek ferry ghats is being hampered due to this reason. Sometimes the vehicles are

to wait for the high tide for crossing the river.

The river routes play a very important role in the trade and commerce of the region. The business activities at the vital river port of Char Muguria have substantially reduced due to the accumulation of silt in the river Aryal Khan. A similar situation has been prevailing in Rajoir and Takerhat ports.

Human habitation is growing on the shoals in different parts of Shariatpur, locals said.

The concerned authorities were not taking any measure for necessary dredging of the rivers and the situation this year has turned acute.